

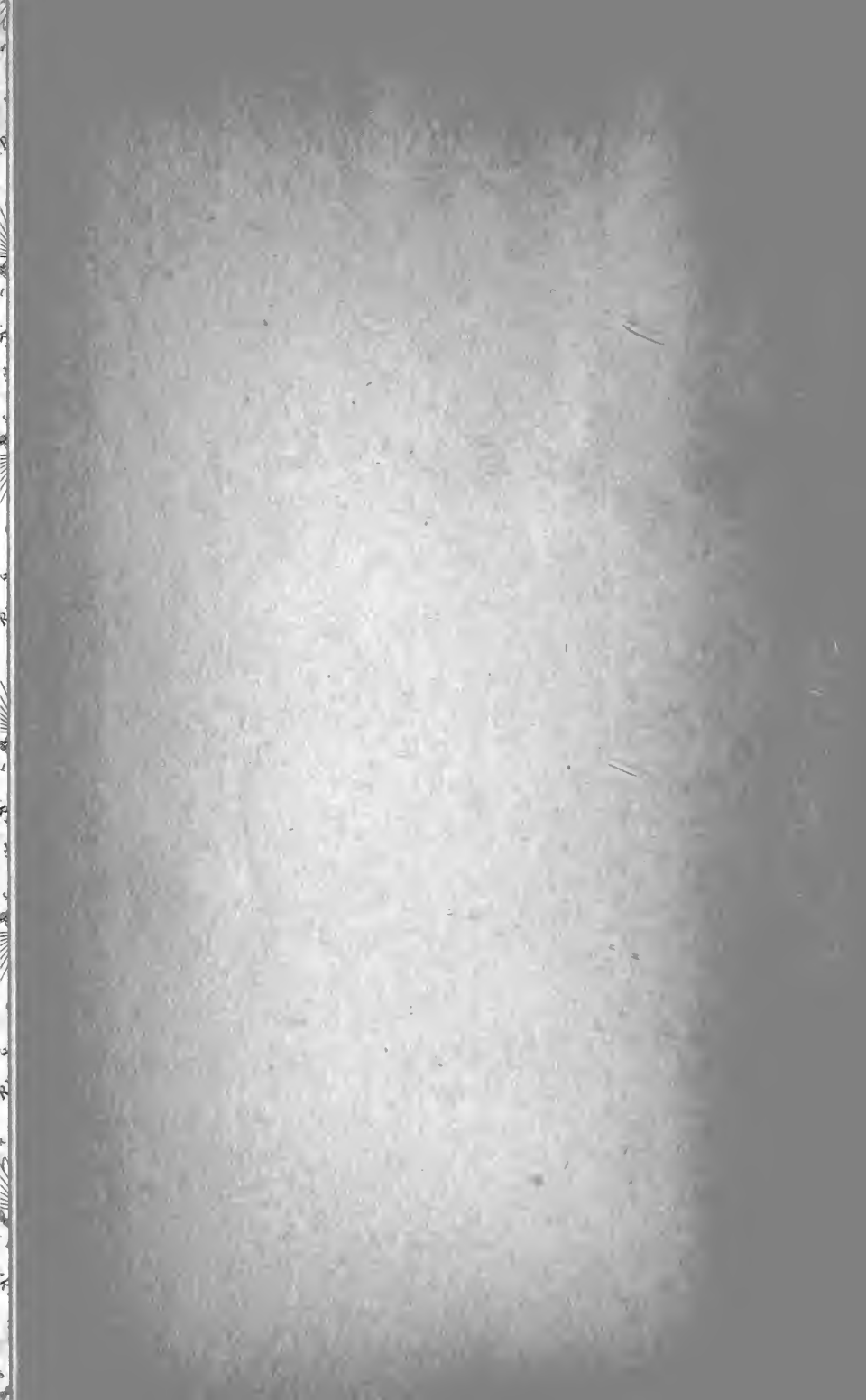


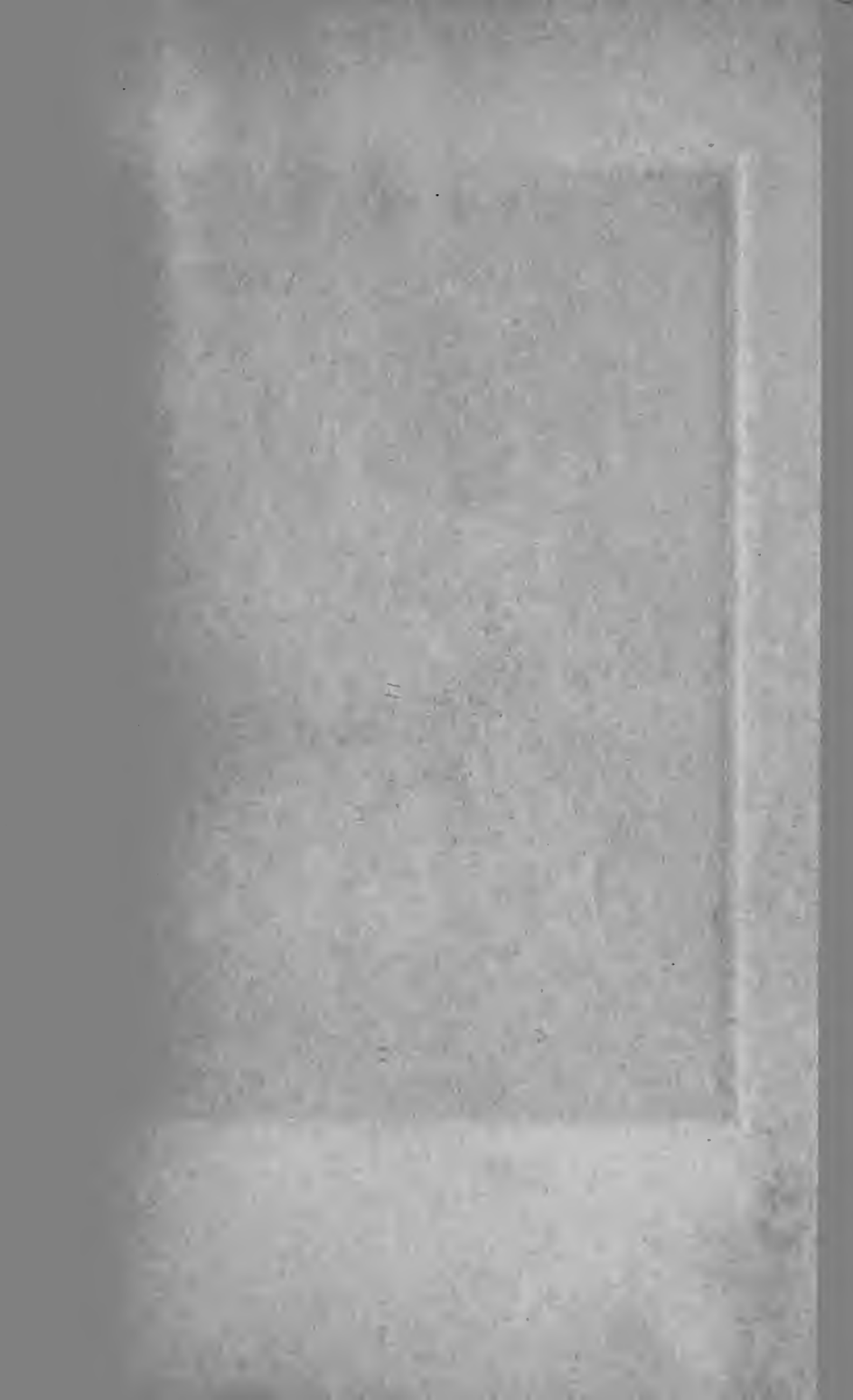






**THOMAS LOVE PEACOCK**







*Thomas Love Peacock*  
*from the Painting by Henry Wallis, in the National Portrait Gallery.*

# THOMAS LOVE PEACOCK

## A CRITICAL STUDY

*Revised* BY  
A. MARTIN FREEMAN

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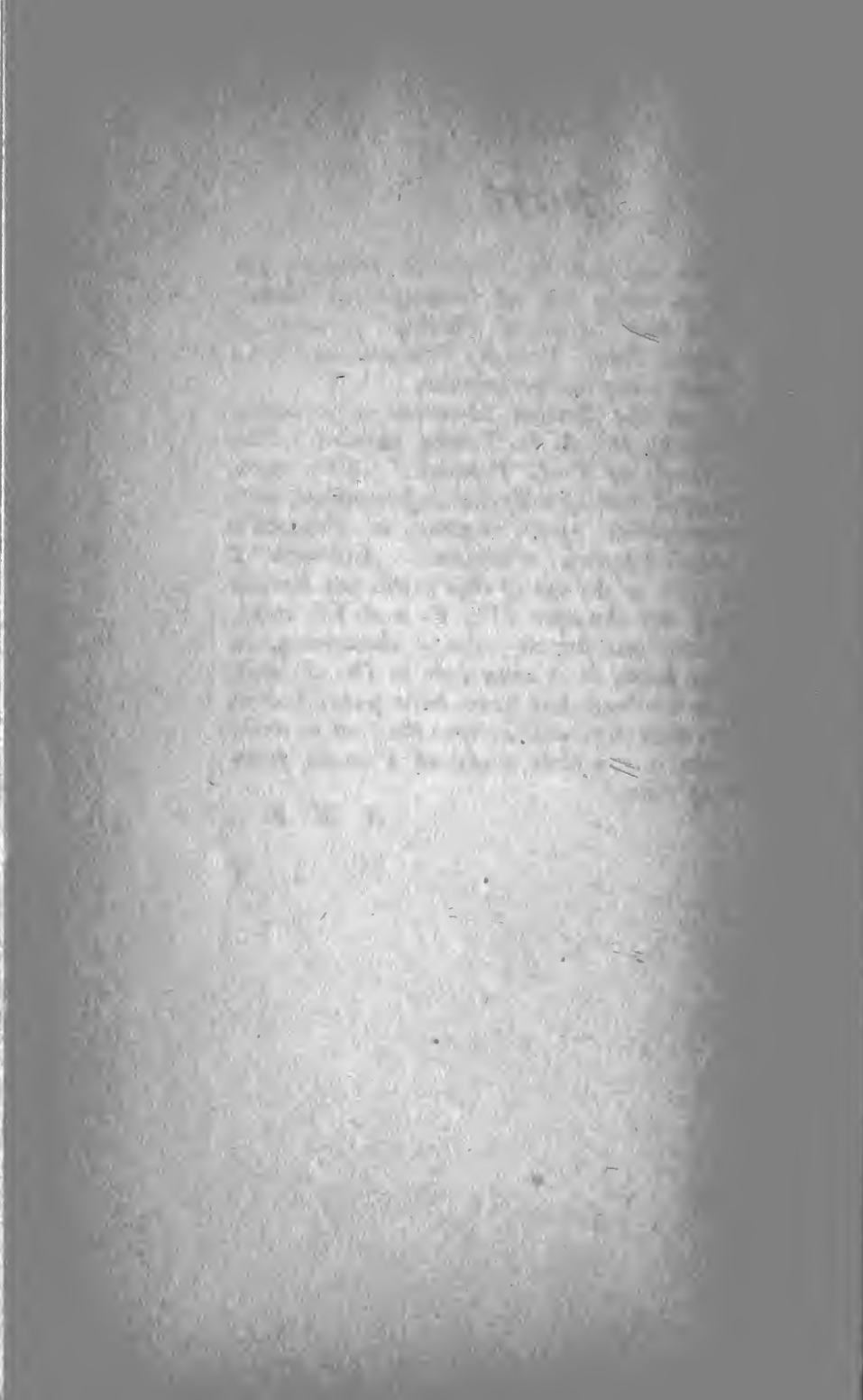


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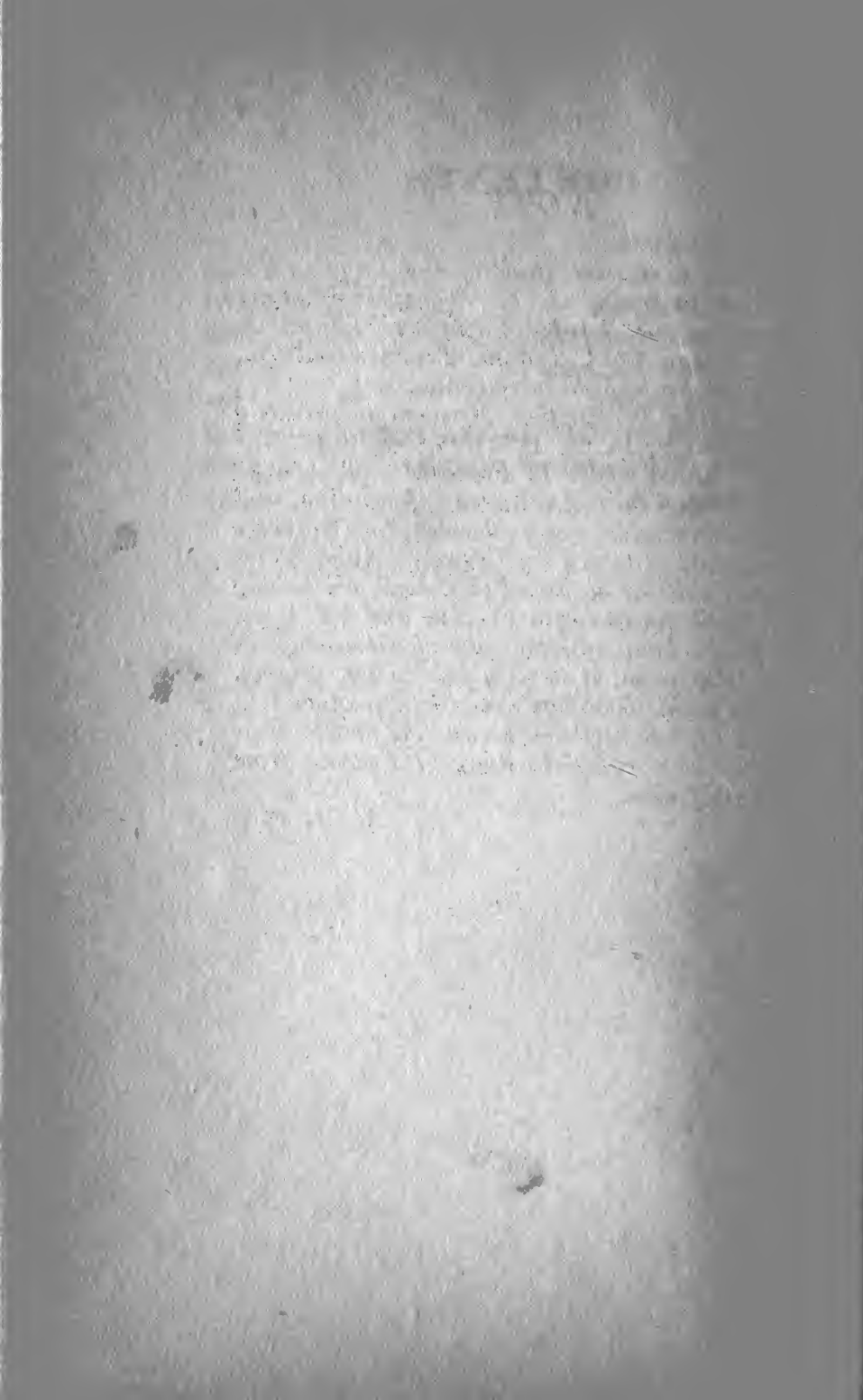


## NOTE

*My thanks are due to Professor Dowden for permission to make use of biographical matter contained in his "Life of Shelley"; and to Messrs. Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., Ltd., for confirming the permission.*

*There is in the British Museum a privately issued Thesis by Dr. A. B. Young, entitled "The Life and Novels of T. L. Peacock." This work contains a good deal of collected information, and has a considerable space devoted to Peacock's political and literary criticisms. Although I have made little or no use of this work, not having read it until my chapters IV., V. and VI. were, except for excisions for the sake of shortening, in their present form, it is only fair to Dr. Young, especially as his book has never been published in England, to state here that he was the first to write anything like a complete study of Peacock from this point of view.*

*A. M. F.*



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## I

### EARLY INFLUENCES

**I**N one of his letters from Italy, Shelley mentions an early belief of his own, that anything which a man does, speaks, thinks, suffers, may be interpreted as an allegory or image of his whole life. The investigation of this theory with regard to an entertaining biography might conceivably lead to interesting developments and modifications, and these, in addition to the many instances that might be found of its absolute truth, would doubtless afford an amusing if not overwhelmingly instructive study. Its application to the life of Thomas Love Peacock is not possible except in a very fragmentary manner. The published records are so broken, and the references of his contemporaries are of such disparate interest and of such varying degrees of biographical importance, that it is difficult to see his life as a whole or to recognise in it any well-developed scheme. In tracing the course of the Thames, on that romantic

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expedition which he made in order to provide himself with material for his anti-Romantic poem, his only difficulty was in locating exactly its source. That once accomplished, the towing-path and the barge brought him easily and inevitably to the sea. But the course of his life is that of a remote and lonely stream, approachable only at certain points, the greater part of its channel being hidden in impenetrable mystery.

His career, unlike those of many men of his time, with whom he was acquainted at various periods, was what is called uneventful. He had not the popularity as an author nor the fondness for "society" which might bring him into newspaper notoriety, or cause him to figure prominently in the journals of the more notable men of his day. His favourite pursuits were solitary; the occupation of his mature years made him almost completely anonymous; his wanderings took him, generally alone, to remote parts of England or Wales, and were not diversified even by that most fashionable of the amusements of the day, a visit to the Continent. He was neither a modish nor a voluminous writer, and was not constantly called upon by publishers for reminiscences or articles of a personal nature for the magazines. To write a

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full and satisfactory account of his life would consequently only be practicable if there were a large mass of detailed material available ; and it would then resolve itself into a chronicle of study and rambling, of boating and walking, of conversations and theorising, of work and of gradually accumulated knowledge and widening interests. It would slowly unfold the intimate and reflective progress of a personality so pronounced that the slightest anecdote seems to add something vital to its effect, of a writer of such intense individuality that his shortest fragments of prose possess a tantalising interest, and whose thoughts and fancies could never fail to charm. But in the extreme scarcity (so far as is yet known) of letters or journals, it seems highly improbable that such an account can ever be put together. Our knowledge of his life is limited to a number of scattered unconnected facts. His writings are not continuous. There are long intervals of time between many of his books—years during which his commentary on public affairs is silent and the course of his life disappears like a sunken stream. Young men who read *Crotchet Castle*, the sixth of his novels, married and had children, and the children grew up to manhood and read *Gryll Grange*, his seventh and last, when their

fathers had forgotten its author. Between the publication of his first and last poem sixty years had elapsed; but the records of his existence would, if placed in close juxtaposition, hardly fill out ten years.

Yet as we piece together the scanty and insufficient notices, Shelley's discarded theory hovers near and obtrudes itself at intervals, now calling for confirmation, now emphasising a remarkable contradiction, and anon arresting the attention at some hardly noticeable circumstance, asking whether or no this is a true instance of the manifestation of the principle. There is a strange congruence, a harmonious cohesion in some of his otherwise unrelated actions, utterances and aspirations, as though Nature and Fortune, making use of him sometimes as a confederate and at other moments as an unconscious agent, were striving to impart to his life, with its experiences and accomplishments, that unity which he as a philosopher would have approved, and which seems so signally lacking in the careers of most men, whose history more often presents a uniformity of aimlessness.

For the purposes of our criticism we shall have to notice the influences of his early years, so far as they can be traced, and in so far as

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they have any recognisable bearing on his intellectual and artistic development; his first productive period, when he attempted to storm the citadel of Fame with volumes of antiquated descriptive and philosophical verse; the years passed in contact with Shelley, and his first four satires; the years following, when he wrote his three romances and the conversation-novel of his maturity. An occasional glance is all that can be obtained of the long succeeding portion of his life, sparsely scattered over with some interesting reviews, some charming articles of more personal interest, including his recollections of Shelley, and culminating in the conversation-romance-epilogue of his old age.

It is at least noticeable that, being the son of a merchant who had married into a naval family, he developed great aptitude both for business and navigation. To that extent his nativity seems to lend support to the theory of unity and plan in his life. But there immediately arises to combat this presumption a consideration, which appears at first sight seriously to invalidate it. His first employment was in a merchant's office, his second on board a man-of-war: both were very soon abandoned as hopelessly unsuitable. His final and permanent appointment however may lead

again to the original point of view. The East India House was the sphere in which he found a compromise between a common clerkship and a government appointment; while the work of his department, chiefly administrative and financial, afforded a good opportunity for the exercise of a union of the aristocratic and commercial qualities. But we have skipped thirty-four years . . .

His father was Samuel Peacock, a glass-merchant, carrying on his trade in St. Paul's Churchyard. Nothing of any interest seems to be known of his family or himself. A fragment of an old day-book proves that he was in business in the year 1768. The birth of his only child took place at Weymouth in October, 1785, but as he had him baptised in London at the end of the year, it is to be presumed that he was still in business at that date. He died about three years afterwards. His wife was Sarah, daughter of Thomas Love, a naval captain. She survived her husband thirty-five years, and was her son's best and most intimate friend. "He loved her," says the writer of an article in the *North British Review*, "with a love beyond that of common natures. He consulted her judgment in all that he wrote, and some time after her death he remarked to

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a friend that he had never written with any zeal since." Her death does in truth seem to have affected him more than any other event of his life. For more than twenty-five years from that date he wrote nothing longer than a magazine article. Many of the fragmentary beginnings of satires and romances among his manuscripts belong to that period, and it was very likely owing to the want of her encouragement that they were left unfinished.

After the death of her husband, Mrs. Peacock and her son lived with her father in Chertsey. At this house the boy no doubt heard daily talk of the sea, not only from his grandfather, but from his mother as well, whose brother and nephew were also in the navy. Letters from them would afford the most interesting and welcome topic of conversation, and give rise to questions by his mother and explanations by his grandfather, constituting his early education in maritime affairs. Thus the environment of his early years was added to the influence of heredity to produce in him a keen interest in every form of seamanship, a passion for which he provided an outlet at all times of his life, taking advantage of whatever scope and vehicle chance threw in his path.

In this way the first impressions of childhood



may safely be said to have had considerable influence on the tastes and abilities developed in his maturer years. But it is possible also that at this impressionable age he made his first acquaintance with a number of fanciful statements, passing current as facts of natural history, which were subsequently forced upon his attention by a curious fatality, until he exalted them to their proper sphere in imaginative literature and embodied them in a satirical romance. If we are to believe the authorities, he may be said to have begun to collect material for his novels at the age of three. For we are told that his grandfather was the original of Captain Hawltaught in *Melincourt*. If there were no motive for this character-sketch, other than the desire to perpetuate the memory of his jovial relative, certainly no writer ever made less use of what must have been unusually rich opportunities. The brief account of Captain Hawltaught is vivid enough, but truly remarkable as an *in memoriam*. It is related that "a dangerous wound compelled the old captain to renounce his darling element, and lay himself up in ordinary for the rest of his days. He retired on his half-pay and the produce of his prize-money to a little village in the west of England, where he employed himself very

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assiduously in planting cabbages and watching the changes of the wind." He was "fond of his bottle of wine after dinner and his glass of grog at night," and would sit up half the night with Sir Oran, over a flowing bowl, singing *Rule Britannia*, *True Courage*, or *Tom Tough*. He habitually declared "he was sure every enemy to wine and grog must have clapped down the hatches of his conscience on some secret villainy, which he feared the good liquor would pipe ahoy, and he usually concluded by striking up *Nothing like Grog*, *Saturday Night*, or *Swing the Flowing Bowl*, his friend Oran's horn ringing in sympathetic symphony. The old captain used to say that grog was the elixir of life: but it did not prove so to him; for one night he tossed off his last bumper, sang his last stave, and heard the last flourish of his Oran's horn." The first sentences of the description are applicable to a certain extent to grandfather Love who, as master of H.M.S. *Prothee*, had lost a leg in an action against the French under Rodney in 1782. He could no doubt be said with perfect correctness to be living at Chertsey "on his half-pay and the produce of his prize-money." But there were of course scores of retired sailors similarly situated, to whom the description would be equally applicable. Char-

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acterisation is entirely restricted to the account of his convivial habits. At that time, over a hundred years ago, these were only considered reprehensible by a small minority of people; still, it is hardly to be imagined that Peacock put his grandfather into one of his books for the sole purpose of commemorating his habitual intemperance. Moreover, his attachment to the bottle, like the circumstances of his service and retirement, was not singular enough to distinguish him from a multitude of others. The clue then to the identity of Captain Love and Captain Hawltaught, if it exist, must be sought in the only remaining piece of information which is given regarding the latter, namely, that it was he who introduced Sir Oran to Mr. Forester. Is this a truthful fable, a mystical acknowledgment of the author's early-contracted debt? Remembering that Mr. Forester represents Peacock, and taking Captain Hawltaught as meaning Captain Love, it is not difficult to see in the two pages of *Melincourt* in which the old gentleman appears, an indirect statement of the fact that the young Thomas Love Peacock was made acquainted by his grandfather, not with Sir Oran in person, but with the sailors' tales and legends about him. Such stories, though possibly more lively in detail, could not easily

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have been more romantic in substance than what was related of him in the philosophical literature of the day. Dismissed as idle tales, they would have been vividly recalled by the learned books which were read later on. Proof is of course impossible, but such a reference to his first authority was quite in Peacock's manner. In *Melincourt* almost every character can be accounted for, not only for his part in the story but for an extraneous reason as well. This supposition would explain the introduction of Captain Hawltaught. He is not necessary either to the story, the theories, or the satire, and is brought in merely because he first introduced Mr. Oran (as he then was) to civilisation and to Mr. Forester.

With the arrival of Peacock's school-days conjecture happily gives way to evidence. The first and most interesting is contained in *Some Recollections of Childhood: by the Author of "Headlong Hall."* Written when he was fifty, and published in the first number of *Bentley's Miscellany*, they record some of his impressions at the beginning of this second period of his life. Together with the descriptive sketch called *The Last Day of Windsor Forest* and one or two small poems, they are remarkable among the mass of his finished writings as being ostensibly

autobiographical, and approaching more nearly to personal and intimate utterance than anything else intended by him to reach the public. And even this description of them needs qualifying. It would indeed be surprising if a man so habitually and consistently ironical, so completely restrained and reserved whenever he is not indulging in pure buffoonery or objective description, should be found writing a series of confessions for the amusement of the critics or even for the delectation of posterity. These are not so much recollections of his own childhood as childish memories of other people and external things. They must be read as strictly true to fact, for there is no reason to doubt the author's intention ; and they would lose all point if they were fabricated ; such is their brevity and, in spite of the great charm of style, their incoherence. Yet they are by no means rich in actual information, and are chiefly interesting because they are reminiscent, in almost every line, of his novels. He has kept his own personality as much as possible in the background, and has given us a minute chapter, a paragraph, concerning some of those early impressions which were to be reproduced in his writings. The name of the place in which the scene is laid, The Abbey House, brings the reader imme-

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diately into the familiar atmosphere, and another characteristic touch is added by the description of the house and gardens. The article is throughout an excellent example of his style, and were it not for the use of the first personal pronoun might well be the introductory chapter of a book like *Headlong Hall* or *Nightmare Abbey*.

The house had been built near the site of one of those ancient abbeys, "whose demesnes the pure devotion of Henry VIII. transferred from their former occupants (who foolishly imagined they had a right to them, though they lacked the might which is its essence) to the members of his convenient parliamentary chorus, who helped him to run down his Scotch octave of wives." The ruins were left in that state which most admirably fitted them to become the subject of a description by Peacock. With the exception of a gateway and a piece of wall, the only remains were those of the fishponds, "a kind of piscatorial panopticon, where all approved varieties of freshwater fish had been classified, each in its own pond, and kept in good order, clean and fat, for the mortification of the flesh of the monastic brotherhood on fast days."

Though not so large as most of the country mansions at which the entertainments and symposia of the novels take place, the house was

sufficiently dignified to have "a pair of massy iron gates, which gave entrance to a circular gravel road, encompassing a large smooth lawn with a sundial in the centre," a broad flight of stone steps, a ponderous portal, and a great antique hall. This contained a recess with a porter's chair and was paved with chequered black and white marble; it gave access to the principal rooms, the servants' wing and the great staircase. Among other notable features of the large old-fashioned gardens were two groves of trees with a wide glade between them, running from a point opposite the garden steps at the back of the house to the limit of the property, and thus affording a view of the open country beyond. The darker of the groves was naturally mysterious, and one evening seemed on the point of yielding up some of its secrets, or at least calling attention to their existence. Peacock, aged seven years, was enraptured to be the discoverer of the fact that the grove was haunted. Such a possibility had often been discussed, but now at last he had seen the ghost. He immediately communicated the news, which was treated with becoming seriousness. The whole household assembled, and proceeded in a body to investigate the scene of the apparition. The result was sadly disillusioning. The grove



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had not spoken, or if it had, it was in a frivolous and unworthy manner. A tall blossoming lily, growing on the outskirts of the trees, was gently swaying to and fro in the wind, so that from the point where the child had stood it was alternately visible and hidden.

Besides this incident, only two others are recorded, and of these Peacock himself was only concerned directly with one. The first is, that he once wrenched away from the nursery maid the "garden carriage," containing the baby, and "set off at full speed; and had not run many yards before I overturned the carriage and rolled out the little girl. The child cried like Alice Fell, and would not be pacified. Luckily she ran to her sister, who let me off with an admonition and the exaction of a promise never to meddle again with the child's carriage." The second, more sober and more shadowy, is his successful intercession for Charles, the son of the house, who had been confined to his room in disgrace for some misdemeanour towards an elderly relative, to whose authority he had a rooted objection. "I found him in his chamber sitting by the fire with a pile of ghostly tales, and an accumulation of lead which he was casting into dumps in a mould. . . . He was determined not to make any submission,

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and his captivity was likely to last till the end of his holidays." For some reason this scene made a deep and lasting impression on Peacock. He says that in later life he could never hear of any one being "in the dumps" without having it vividly recalled to his memory; and when he first read the lines in *Don Juan* :

I pass my evenings in long galleries solely,  
And that's the reason I'm so melancholy,

he was immediately transported in thought to this room, at the end of a long corridor, of his schoolfellow's captivity.

The grown-ups of the establishment had none of the salient peculiarities that might have tempted Peacock to enter upon a detailed description of them. They were old-fashioned people living an exceedingly quiet and retired life, and as such they receive his warm approbation. The mother and eldest daughter possessed "all the solid qualities which were considered female virtues in the dark ages," and seldom left the grounds except to go to church and to take their daily drive. The daughter played the harpsichord and made exquisite preserves. Peacock enjoyed listening to her music, but often incurred her mild displeasure by "playing the bells" upon the instrument so vigorously as to put it out of tune. The pre-

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serves were in his eyes the brightest ornaments of the supper table, of which he speaks in tender and respectful tones.

Such is the information which he has given us about his childhood, an account in which as many material facts are suppressed as could possibly be dispensed with. We learn from a manuscript fragment that the abbey was that of Chertsey. In the published *Recollections* he merely says that it was situated near "a country town" where many of his earliest days were passed. He makes no mention of his own home. He does not even divulge the name of the family who inhabited The Abbey House. Yet this little sketch is far from negligible as a biographical document, since, in addition to its intrinsic charm, it possesses a great interest in standing in a distinct and important relation to his novels. The atmosphere of the house and grounds, as he has managed to convey it in the few lines devoted to them, is that of the mansions of his fiction, and it cannot be called vague or undistinguished. The memory of the days which he spent there must have been constantly with him. The spaciousness and profusion of the establishment must have clung to his fancy and made no uncertain appeal to him when he was working in a city office, and during the

years of comparative poverty which he passed through as a young man. It is not to be wondered at that the scene of so many of his stories should be located in similar mansions. They were but the castles in Spain wherein he indulged his tastes for good living and ingenious conversation. It is of course true that a large and hospitable country house provided the most obvious and easy setting for stories such as his. Caring little or nothing for preliminaries, he is only anxious to bring together, with as short a delay as possible, his company of cranks and fools and scholars, and make them talk and dance, perform their antics and display their incongruous peculiarities, for his own amusement and that of his readers. Yet its convenience as a background would in itself be inadequate to account for the amount of attention devoted to the country house in most of his tales. In his books, superfluous description may almost be said not to exist. There are a few passages of terse though enthusiastic description of natural scenery, though this is often in immediate connection with the situation of the house: personal appearance and dress are very sparingly indicated, especially in the earlier works: towns, villages, inns, and other objects, appearing but as items of travel or discussion,

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receive no individual treatment whatever. But the houses—Redrose Abbey, Melincourt Castle, Nightmare Abbey and the rest—are, if not elaborately, yet carefully and lovingly described, and their treatment gives to his books an atmosphere which they would otherwise lack, and which is moreover that of this house of his early memories. This is only one instance of the homogeneousness of his writings, and their close correspondence with his own experience. Charles, comforting himself in his isolated room with ghost stories and leaden dumps, might be a youthful study of Scythrop in his tower, surrounded with weird novels and mysterious appliances: the gardens, with their groves and large old-fashioned flowers, lilies, hollyhocks, sunflowers, seem to challenge the criticism of Mr. Milestone: the simple and orderly life of the inmates of The Abbey House invokes the blessing of the Reverend Dr. Opimian.

## II

### YOUTHFUL COMPOSITIONS

**T**HE *Recollections of Childhood* refer to the beginning of Peacock's school life. From this time to about the end of his thirteenth year he was at a boarding school at Englefield Green, kept by a man whose name is variously given as Dicks and Wicks. He is said to have been proud of his pupil, while Peacock in turn speaks highly of him. Their mutual respect was founded on something broader than proficiency in Latin grammar. Some of those who knew Peacock assert that in spite of his wide reading he was never an exact scholar, and this is precisely the criticism which he afterwards made of his master, though praising him highly for his enthusiasm and sympathy, and for his success in making the boys take interest and pleasure in what he taught them. The latter are after all the most vital and valuable qualities of a teacher, and were of especial benefit to Peacock, for in the few years at Englefield Green he received the only educa-

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tion which he was ever forced or helped to acquire. In that short time, learning itself could hardly have been brought within his reach, but the love of learning could be and undoubtedly was imparted. In his case, encouragement alone was needed. His studious turn of mind was already declaring itself, and when he had a holiday he often preferred to spend it in reading by the riverside, showing thus early the love of books and the open air, enjoyed if possible together, that lasted throughout his life.

Five or six short pieces, letters and copies of verses, written before he left school, are in existence. The first is perhaps an epitaph, dated from the school house and therefore presumably for one of the boys. Two longer and more ambitious attempts are preserved among his manuscripts. A letter in verse to his cousin Robert Walrond, then in Madrid, is dated Chertsey, September 25th, 1795. Peacock was then within a month of his tenth birthday, and the letter must have been written towards the close of the summer holidays. After protestations of friendship and a few items of family news, he indulges in a little ornamental writing on the subject of his cousin's expected return :

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Calm when you sail may Neptune keep  
The surgy billows of the deep  
Ah should old Davi ope his jaw  
And lodge you in his hungry maw ;  
Sorrow pale would fill my breast,  
To loose my friend would loose my rest.  
Let not Aeolus vex the waves,  
Lock'd be the winds in roaring caves.

Thirteen years later Mr. Walrond received a presentation copy of *The Genius of the Thames*. To us, as possibly to him, this early effort is the more entertaining of the two. We can imagine that the delight of Mr. Dicks or Wicks would not have been unbounded if he had seen the line about Aeolus ; but the epistle is no mean achievement considered as a self-imposed holiday task. It is fifty lines in length, and the state of the punctuation suggests that some of them were written at white heat.

The second document, written at school from one to two years later, is in prose, and contains high and serious matter. Though folded in the same way as the letter to Madrid, it has no address outside. It begins "Dear Sir," and ends "I am &c. &c. T. L. P." It was therefore probably never intended to be sent by post, and may have been a school exercise. Full of rhetorical exaggeration, it is still interesting as showing that public affairs were already



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beginning to attract the writer, and the subject, "the present alarming state of the country," is curiously like that of an essay, now lost and perhaps never finished, mentioned in his diary some twenty years later, "On the probable Result of the Present State of Things." The letter was composed in 1796, during the scare of a French invasion. "At this time," says the child of eleven, "threatened by a powerful and victorious enemy, and bending under a load of severe exactions, I take up my pen to give you my sentiments."

The tone marks a sad descent from that of the preceding letter. The childish manner has disappeared, with the ingenuous communication of spontaneous sentiments. In their stead is an attempt to reproduce grown-up habits of speech and writing in their most absurd aspect. Precocity has taken the place of originality. The imitative period has commenced. Yet such an exhibition of budding political feeling and assertive patriotism, of the "God save the King and God damn the French" type, may well have given great satisfaction to teachers and elders, who are often inordinately gratified at seeing their charges begin to grow up and become like themselves. The preservation of the document goes to prove that some one thought highly of it.

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Peacock's childhood was in fact drawing to a close, and was to terminate abruptly in a city office at an age when boys more favoured by fortune are just realising, at a public school, that cricket is a very serious thing. The exact date of his leaving school and removal to London is not known ; but at the beginning of the year 1800 he is seen to be in the employment of a firm in Throgmorton Street, who vouch on their own responsibility for his having attained the age of fourteen in the previous October. This phase of his life remained unknown or unrecorded until a few years ago, when an article in *The Library* brought it to light. A children's magazine called the *Monthly Preceptor*, started in 1800, offered prizes for essays on set subjects ; and the first number contains the announcement that Master T. L. Peacock is one of the successful competitors.

The subject on which the children were asked to write was " Is History or Biography the more improving Study ? " The first and second prizes were won by boys of fourteen and fifteen with essays which, at the present time, would prove them monsters of precocity. The fourth was awarded to " Master Henry Leigh Hunt, aged 15, educated at Christ's Hospital," who was presented with Dr. Knox's Essays. In

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criticising his work the editor remarks that it has great merit, and were it not for some "trivial marks of haste and incorrectness," would be at least on a level with the more successful efforts. Peacock also competed, and his attempt is remarkable on two counts; for in the first place, unlike all the other aspirants of his age, he was no longer a schoolboy but "a clerk," and secondly, he wrote his essay in verse. It was published "not as a specimen of poetry particularly excellent, but as an extraordinary effort of genius in a boy of this age." He was rewarded with an extra prize, namely *Elegant Extracts in Verse Epitomized*, value five shillings. It is somewhat curious, in the light of subsequent history, to read the encouragement given to the young authors to proceed in the career upon which they have "so respectably" entered. But the good editor attached a modest meaning to the words, and only intended to convey that he hoped they would contribute again to the pages of his paper and win more prizes.

Peacock's verses call for little notice. He decides the question of relative merit in favour of History, in the lines:

Like as the morning star, with humble ray,  
Throws a faint glimmer at the dawn of day,  
Soon as the sun begins his beams to shed,

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He shrinks away to nought and hides his head :  
'Tis thus Biography, whose humblest pace  
Pursues *one* only through life's eager race,  
Before bright Hist'ry's open, daring ray,  
She dwindles into nought, and shrinks away.

Their only quality is ambition. They would be praiseworthy as the production of a child, except that they ought never to have been written by any one. They belong to that school whose best poet could take up the work of its worst, and "correct" it into his own. Perhaps a boy who was fourteen in 1800 and fond of reading could hardly be expected to write in any other style, unless he had been nurtured exclusively on Blake and the less polite poems of Burns. But they are unfortunately prophetic of what was to come, and form a prelude, in an exaggerated manner, to the series of poetical mistakes by which Peacock attempted to make a reputation in his first period of authorship.

We have no means of knowing how long or how seriously he studied the *Monthly Preceptor*, nor is it a question of any consequence. The absurd pretention and attempted completeness of the scheme no doubt provoked a revulsion in his enthusiasm before he had read many numbers, and the memory of this early illusion probably added point and bitterness to his ridicule of the

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“ march of intellect ” and the spread of education. But it may be safely presumed that his ardour had not been quenched by the time he came to the second article in the first number, inaugurating the course of instruction in the Natural History of Animals. In this he was supplied with a second set of statements, in formal and authoritative shape, regarding the structure, habits and character of that being who was to become the hero of *Melincourt*.

Leading off with the divisions of the animal kingdom according to the Linnæan system, the writer explains that the class Primates includes man, the monkey, and the bat. But man, he says, will receive special treatment in that part of the course devoted to the Manners and Customs of Nations ; and after this summary clearing of the ground he passes immediately to the second genus, the ape or monkey or rather, as he significantly expresses it, to the most extraordinary species of the ape kind. The copper plate illustration shows a shape of stately and winning aspect. He is of commanding stature, and chestnut-brown in colour. The long hair of his head is accurately parted down the centre ; his ears are long and shaped like those of a satyr ; his eyebrows are arched, his eyes sunken. His grey moustache is trimmed

short and neatly twisted up at each extremity, and he has a slight fringe of beard under his chin. His shoulders are bowed and his countenance melancholy. The upper part of his body is bare ; but below, his long fur makes him a natural and decent pair of trousers, extending to his ankle. In his outstretched hand he grasps the thickest part of an untrimmed branch which he carries as a staff, the other end resting on the ground near his feet. This is the true blood relation of Sir Oran, who made such a sensation in English drawing-rooms some seventeen years later, and was finally chosen to represent the borough of Onevote at Westminster.

Turning from the illustration to the text, Peacock read that the claim of the species to be regarded as part of the human race is disallowed for two reasons : these apes possess an extra rib in addition to the twelve of man, and they are dumb. Yet the tongue and all the vocal organs are perfect. Their hair much more resembles that of man than the fur of brutes. Moreover "in the palms of his hands are remarkable those lines which are usually taken notice of in palmistry, and at the tips of his fingers, those spiral lines observed in man." But of this tall, pensive and attractive being the writer speaks with a curiously personal

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animus and dislike. His characterisation, however, though unflattering, is remarkably human. "This redoubtable rival of mankind," he writes, "is as tall, or taller than a man ; active, strong and intrepid, cunning, lascivious and cruel." These animals are extremely swift of foot and possessed of extraordinary strength : they build huts to live in, use clubs as weapons of offence, and make some attempt to bury their dead. But it must not be thought, because the Orang has so many human qualities, that he is therefore human. No : in spite of any resemblance to the higher creation, he remains a helpless, hopeless beast, under the general ban of God ; and, in so far as ability to provide for his own comfort and safety is concerned, he is markedly inferior to the elephant and the beaver. In fact, it has been sagely conjectured that in his natural state he goes on all fours, and only learns to walk upright by imitation of mankind.

The discouraging, jealous, goody-goody tone of the latter part of the article could contribute nothing to the conception of Sir Oran. It was wisely discarded and forgotten in the collection of material. The third and most compelling appeal for immortality from this denizen of the confines of humanity reached Peacock when, as a grown man, he studied Lord Monboddo's

*Ancient Metaphysics*, which remained one of his favourite books to the end of his life, and the same author's *Origin and Progress of Language*. In these works he found additional matter, amplifying, idealising, humanising the early sketch of his hero, and affording a potent corrective to the disillusioning tendency of the writer in the *Monthly Preceptor*. With this encouragement, he made up his mind to enter upon a full investigation of the subject (as is shown by the list of names and works quoted in the notes to *Melincourt*) and embody the results of his labours in a synthetic study.

Lord Monboddo is firmly convinced of the humanity of the Orang Outangs. He speaks of them as "a whole nation," which has been found to be, strangely, without the use of speech, though they have made some progress with the arts of life. They are, he says, further advanced than many of the savages found in other parts of the world, and even of Europe, inasmuch as they invariably walk upright, while many of the latter walked on all fours. He gives instances of the immense difficulty of teaching the dumb to speak, and proceeds: "And this very well accounts for what seems so strange at first, that those Orang Outangs that have been brought from Africa or Asia, and many of those solitary



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savages that have been caught in Europe, never learned to speak, tho' they had the organs of pronounciation as perfect as we : for, as it is well known, savages are very indolent, at least with respect to any exercise of the mind, and are hardly excited to any curiosity or desire of learning." He held firmly to his faith ; and when eleven years had elapsed from the writing of the sentence just quoted, he had collected additional evidence to show that the Orang possessed not only the faculties already ascribed to him, but was capable of using a stick for defence as well as for attack, could learn the business of a common sailor, could be taught to play on the flute, was capable of great attachment to particular persons, and was orderly and dignified in behaviour, having an intense loathing for the habits of restlessness and destruction which are characteristic of the monkey. " If," says he, " such an Animal is not a Man, I should desire to know in what the essence of a Man consists, and what it is that distinguishes a Natural Man from the Man of Art ? "

Oranism was now all but complete. The French authorities gave a few additional facts, interesting in themselves and corroborative, but nothing essentially different in quality. A sly hit at these writers is contained in the remarks

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of the Hon. Mrs. Pinmoney on meeting the Baronet and hearing his name: "Haut-ton! French extraction, no doubt. And now I come to think of it, there is something very French in his physiognomy." But the finishing touch was brought from the *Systema Naturæ* of Linnaeus: "He has an upright gait and a hissing speech: he believes that the world was created for him, and that he will one day rule over it again."

Peacock adopted the character as he found it, adding nothing but the suggested identification of his hero with the sylvan deities of classical antiquity. In the novel this point of view is attributed to the "learned mythologist and antiquarian" to whom Mr. Forester had introduced Sir Oran, and who, having reviewed the evidence of science and legend, used to remark that "he had known many profound philosophical and mythological systems founded on much slighter analogies." Thus Peacock entered as the first pioneer into this strange unexploited tract of the imagination.

For how long did Peacock remain in a state of servitude in the house of Ludlow, Fraser and Company? The date of his leaving Chertsey for London used to be given as 1802, so possibly the

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time he spent in the city was very brief, ending in a temporary return to the country. Or perhaps he stayed two years with his employers, and on leaving them was joined by his mother in town. In any case it was about this date that he began to read regularly at the British Museum. This is all that is known of him for some time. His leisure seems to have been as laborious as most men's business. Not content with the classical and foreign literature which he could get through in the daylight hours at the museum, he would often spend the evening with an English book, reading aloud to his mother. The following four or five years were therefore rich in literary influences, uneventful and fortunately unproductive. We may imagine him at this time studying assiduously during the dark months, mastering the classics with a delight that is probably unknown to men who have been educated at high pressure through the process of competing for prizes at school, for scholarships at the university, and for classes in the final examination. We may also be quite sure that he was never perfectly happy, or even tolerably at his ease, if the summer were not broken by a visit to Chertsey or a walking tour in some other part of the country. A few inconsiderable copies of verse, composed in 1801 to 1805, have

been preserved. He versified the Lord's Prayer, a feat which has been performed better and worse, both before and after his time ; he made a translation of some lines of Guacini ; he wrote to a lady " on her recovery " some stanzas that are as carefully fabricated as the drugs which may have helped or hindered the event commemorated. In the September of 1804, when he was nearly nineteen, he composed the first piece showing the characteristics of his later manner—*The Monks of St. Mark*, a rollicking ballad in the anapaestic measure of Browning's " I sprang to the stirrup." Extending to some eighty or ninety lines, it is an account of drinking and reeling, falling and bawling ghostly brothers, and would give complete satisfaction to the most furious anti-teetotaller. It is extremely youthful in tone, and exaggerated in incident ; but it is a genuine Peacockian ballad.

The year 1806 saw the publication of his first volume, *Palmyra and other Poems*, chiefly remarkable in being prefaced by a cento out of the works of Shakespeare, " To Reviewers." This is perhaps the only non-vituperative passage ever written by him to or concerning the journalists, " trading critics," as he generally called them. Some of the tribe were sincerely touched by it as an unusually courteous treatment of their

profession. To attempt to procure a fair hearing by this means seems sufficiently childish and ingenuous ; yet it was by no means an uncharacteristic action. Precocious in learning, Peacock still grew up slowly in other respects. His genius was of a decidedly late blossoming : his taste and critical faculty matured gradually. In some of the letters written at the age of twenty-two or twenty-three he shows a strange delight in a pun, in an elementary misuse of language or an evident contradiction in logic, such as we should rather expect to find in a promising boy of sixteen or seventeen.

The title-poem is a formal ode upon the splendour and decadence of Palmyra, the city of Syria identified with the Tadmor of the Old Testament. The theme is thus conventional though recondite—not a promising combination of qualities. It is hardly necessary to remark that the sources of the poem are entirely literary : they are supplied by classical writings, Gibbon's history and the accounts of modern explorers, and are all quoted, with the author's regular scrupulousness in this respect, in full and sufficient notes at the back of the book. Thus it is easily seen at the outset that none but a genius could, out of material of this nature, produce a poem giving the effect of personal

vision or experience. An effort to do so by deliberate means would lead inevitably to that vagueness and sentimentality, that forcible-feeble exaggeration into which uninspired writers, especially of verse, can hardly escape falling when trying to appear earnest about what has never been a reality to them. It is to the credit of Peacock's good sense that he kept clear of this pitfall. The opening stanzas dwell, with barely suggested description, on the desolation of the site: then follows immediately a commemoration of the events that led up to the subjugation and destruction of the city under Aurelian; and lastly a lament for Palmyra, with reflections on the transitory doom of men, nations and cities. The qualities which in part redeem the poem from the unreadableness to which it seems foredoomed, are a certain dignity and restraint of the language and the sincerity of the emotion. Though it cannot be said to have any great poetical merit, it is saturated with Peacock's curiously passionate regret for the past. He has been blamed for unreasonably obtruding this in some of his later works; but its genuineness is indubitable. This quality alone enabled him to strike occasional sparks of poetry out of the flinty substance of *Palmyra*.

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Some readers of Shelley's letters may have had the curiosity to turn to the conclusion of this poem, to find what Shelley considered the " finest piece of poetry " that he had ever read. If any have done this, their amazement will have been at least equal to their trouble, though hardly an adequate reward. Shelley was of course very young when he made this statement : more than four years were to elapse between the date of the letter containing it and the publication of *Alastor*. Moreover in his private correspondence he wrote hastily, as the mood of the moment dictated, and this passage, occurring in a letter of thanks, was not composed with the deliberation that he might have bestowed on a criticism intended to be sent forth as his final and considered opinion. But, more important than all these factors, it was the second edition that Shelley read, and this has never been reprinted. In this, issued six years after the first publication, *Palmyra* is largely rewritten, and the conclusion entirely changed. The second termination is of course not the finest piece of poetry that Shelley had ever read up to the year 1812, but it is a distinct improvement on the first. It is to be regretted that the reprints all give *Palmyra* in its first form, if only because the present arrangement encourages this wrong

confrontation, and so does injustice both to Shelley and to Peacock.

In the pieces accompanying *Palmyra* the author is seen trying his prentice-hand at other recognised poetical themes of the past generation. The swain, prepared to die of sentiment because his lady refuses to be kind, is missing; but a kindred subject is supplied in the overflowings of Maria, who will perish in the snow because Henry "hid a demon's soul Beneath an angel's beauty." The best of these miscellaneous pieces is *Fiolfar, King of Norway*, a spirited tale founded on Norse legend, telling how Fiolfar overcame and slew Yrrodore, who had stolen away Nitalpha when he was absent on an expedition, and, having discovered his bride, broke the spell of the magic sleep in which she lay, guarded by the dwarfs. The volume contains also a few translations and imitations from classical, Italian and Ossianic pieces, and one or two burlesques, including the light-hearted and felicitous *Slender's Love-Elegy*.

Speaking of the publication some years later, Peacock says that it may be said to have been strangled at birth; yet two at least of the reviewers showed themselves friendly disposed towards it. The *Monthly Review* for March and the *Critical Review* for February each devoted



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nearly two pages to notices of the little volume, consisting mostly of encouragement. The writers of both these are far more markedly than Peacock men of the former age. Their chariness of praise and jealousy for the preeminence of the older writers, their hesitation and uncertainty, make them appear in a solemnly ridiculous light. Their reasoning is implicit, but not concealed by the elegant robe of words. It runs in this manner. "Gray was a good poet, and wrote on Norse subjects; here is a young poet who treats similar themes, and occasionally reminds us of Gray; therefore he is a good poet, or as near good as it is possible for a person of his inferior years, and this degenerate age, to be. We will encourage him, but cautiously." So the highest praise is awarded to him in the sentence: "We almost seem to hear the lyre of Gray resounding at times in this young writer's verse," followed by half a dozen lines from *Fiolfar*.

This kind of criticism was probably quite acceptable to Peacock, especially when it was favourable. Criticism in the modern sense was but recently born. The writers in the smaller reviews, who alone noticed his works, would not have been so vexatious as to inquire of any poet what he had to say. A pleasant passage in verse, tolerably smooth and not outraging the

canons deducible from the productions of the poets who flourished in the age of authority, was good poetry. A work which offended them by innovation, irregularity, waywardness, in a word, by want of resemblance to what they considered the best poems that had been or could be written, was bad.

The writer in the *Critical Review* is weighed down by a great anxiety, lest by praising too much he should lose some of his dignity. He assures the author, to start with, that the cento "To Reviewers" has not swayed his critical judgment; at the same time "the volume is really so pleasing that we feel inclined to dilate upon it beyond the narrow bounds we usually prescribe to ourselves on these occasions," meaning presumably, in reviewing first attempts. He cannot help saying that *Maria's Return* "will at least put modern lyrical poems to the blush." He is not really comfortable until he falls to reprimanding the author for having included "a vulgar Jew song" in the collection. "We can assure the author," he writes in a sentence that should have killed the plural unity of reviewers, "that we are not Jews; but we can by no means approve the illiberality, buffoonery and nonsense of this portion of the book." The offending poem required the wrath of a

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ponderous critic to drag it from its natural obscurity :

My fader cried ' clothesh ' trough de shtreetsh  
as he vent,

Dough he now shleeping under de shtone ish ;  
He made by his bargainsh two hundred per  
shent,

And dat way he fingered de monish.

The absurd gravity of the reviewer seems to react upon the flippancy of the verses, and the opposition of the two produces a humourous situation, a more than adequate recompense for the authorship of *Levi Moses*.

The springs by which the critical machinery was worked are laid bare in no less striking fashion by the article in the *Monthly Review*. The number containing the notice of Peacock's volume includes also reviews of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, of Joanna Baillie's *Miscellaneous Plays*, and of numerous Odes, Poems, Monodies, Threnodies, Rhapsodies, Elegies and Tributes called forth by the death of Nelson. The *Lay* is treated to a long and flattering notice ; but the grievances of the critic are as curious as some of his conclusions are startling. The Border Minstrelsy is still evidently rankling in his mind, and he goes out of his way to remark " Mr. Scott's own compositions are greatly superior to those which he has collected and edited with such

minuteness of version and luxury of typography." The phrase "at a word" calls for his official censure, and he declares that *buttress*, *plinth* and *crypt* should be "banished from the dictionary of the Muses." He seems to credit Sir Walter, or rather to reproach him, with the authorship of the hymn *Dies Iræ*, from which he quotes two lines, adding that they "would make a capital figure in Drunken Barnaby's Journal." But the true critical standpoint is manifest in all frankness and simplicity in the article on Miss Baillie's plays. The writer's tone is generally appreciative; but he advises the author that, to obtain greater success, the fashion of her work "instead of attempting ambitious irregularity, should be copied from some good old artist. It is perhaps impossible to effect more than our best dramatic writers have already accomplished, let this fair author, then, be contented with trying to imitate instead of deviating from the most successful efforts of human genius."

These short extracts will make it plain that no one possessed of a modicum of critical faculty need have been very seriously disturbed by what the *Monthly Review* might have to say of his work. But criticisms in monthly magazines have an alarming air of authority; and it is difficult for an author to remain absolutely un-

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moved by them, however contemptuous he may feel. When he opened this number, and saw the large space allotted to Scott, Baillie, Nelson and "An Essay on Man, upon principles opposite to those of Lord Bolingbroke," it must have given no small gratification to the young author to read the final dictum of the critic: "Fenced and barricaded as Helicon is, a few individuals occasionally contrive to clamber over the inclosure, and to get a sip from the sacred fountain. Mr. Peacock appears to be one of this favoured minority." As a summary criticism of all Peacock's poetical work and an indication of his place among the poets, this pronouncement might seem reasonable enough to-day. As a judgment on his first volume it is excessively sanguine: and if we could discuss with the critic his reasons for arriving at it we should probably disagree with him in every instance, and conclude, that if his favourite passages were in fact the best in the book, its only destination was the dust-heap.

### III

#### PSEUDO-CLASSICISM

**F**OR the next two years of Peacock's life the record is broken, and it is impossible to give much account of them. We learn from a letter written at the end of this period that immediately on attaining his majority he went on one of those long tours which were always his chief delight. His own words supply the only available facts and the only possible comment. "You went," he writes, "over the same ground on which I wandered alone in the autumn of 1806. You visited Dalkeith. Is not the Esk a most delightful stream? Did you see that enchanting spot where the North and South Esk unite? Did you think of the lines of Sir Walter Scott, 'His wandering feet . . . And classic Hawthornden?' Did you visit the banks of the sweet silver Teviot, and that most lovely of rivers, the indescribably fascinating Tweed? Did you sit by moonlight in the ruins of Melrose? Did you stand at twilight in that romantic wood which overhangs the Teviot on the sight of Roxburgh Castle?"

This letter must serve as the chronicle for 1806. Some time in this year or in the first half of the next he moved back to Chertsey; and about this time, probably before his migration, he made the acquaintance of Edward Hookham, who with his brother Thomas carried on in Bond Street the publishing business and circulating library founded by their father. Hookham became one of Peacock's most intimate friends, and published all his books with the exception of the first edition of *Palmyra*. Both Shelley and Peacock borrowed extensively from the library when they were away from London, and the meeting between the two was almost certainly brought about by their common acquaintance. Hookham deserves the gratitude of posterity for having preserved a number of letters from Peacock which, in addition to their intrinsic interest, constitute almost the only evidence for about three years of his life. This series, now in the British Museum, comprises only a part of those in existence. But they are a good selection. They throw light on the time Peacock spent at sea, in exploring the Thames, and part of that passed afterwards in Wales. They cover the period from the first project of his poem, *The Genius of the Thames*, to its completion and the first notices of it in the press. They

thus enable us, as it were, to watch Peacock at work, and to learn something of his method of composition and his attitude towards literature. Some eight years later we have a similar opportunity of looking over his shoulder while he was engaged upon an unfinished prose work.

It is not at all clear how this important literary friendship originated ; but from the first preserved letter it seems probable that Hookham had offered to issue *Palmyra* in a revised form. He can hardly have been induced to make this proposal by the reception accorded to the volume by the public ; possibly he thought it a work of more promise than achievement, and considered it advisable to secure the rights of publishing the author's work. The letter in question is dated from Chertsey, August 3rd, 1807, and shows that at that time the acquaintance was still quite new, though the two men were not unknown to each other. Peacock addresses Hookham as "My dear Sir," and signs himself "Yours sincerely." He begins "I shall avail myself of your generous offer, and put my little vessel again on the stocks." As this sentence is followed by a request for Volney's *Voyage en Syrie* and Montesquieu *Sur la Grandeur et Décadence des Romains*, it is pretty obvious that he refers to the rewriting of *Palmyra*, and is desirous of



consulting his authorities afresh. Yet he runs on, with no break or paragraph in the writing, to say that "the poem" may possibly be arranged in four divisions, though perhaps he has undertaken more than he can perform, and will be obliged to leave it unfinished. This can not refer to *Palmyra*, but to the contemplated poem on the Thames. Such slovenliness and ambiguity, even though the meaning would be perfectly clear to his correspondent, are exceedingly unlike Peacock's usual style in letter-writing. The explanation is probably to be found in the circumstance to which he attributes the brevity of the note: "I am writing in a great hurry, and after dinner, a time at which I am not very fond of flourishing a goose-quill." The point is not of great importance, and not very clear; but it must be left as it is. We shall hear no more of Peacock for another fifteen months, when the letter quoted at the beginning of this chapter was written.

During these years, of which so meagre an account can be given, Peacock seems to have written next to nothing. There is only one finished composition which may with great probability be assigned to this period. In the absence of actual proof, internal evidence points to a date not later than the early part of 1808

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for *The Circle of Loda*, a romantic drama of Norse and Irish chieftains of the heroic age. This piece, with his two comedies of contemporary life, *The Dilettanti* and *The Three Doctors*, remained unpublished, although beautiful fair copies, which would have delighted the printers, were made of all of them. They were issued last year in a small volume, with a preface by Dr. A. B. Young. *The Circle of Loda* is obviously the earliest of the three. The historical foundation of the play—the feuds between the Irish and Norse—is the same as that of *Fiolfar, King of Norway*, and there is a general resemblance in the two plots and in their treatment. The lyrics, plentifully interspersed throughout the play, show Peacock's talent in that direction in a very early stage of development, many of them recalling such pieces as *Romance* and *The Vigils of Fancy*, both belonging to 1806.

Written in blank verse, the dialogue of this first play has a great advantage in style and diction over the poems of that year ; but this difference, great as it is from an artistic point of view, is no argument for assigning the composition to a later date. It merely tends to show that in writing a piece intended to be spoken on the stage, Peacock saw the value of simplicity and directness of language, which he had not yet

recognised to be a necessity in poetry that was only to be read. We know, too, that after he had written still more simply and unaffectedly, in the prose and verse of his other plays and in one or two lyrics, he returned to his solemnly ornamental manner in the *Philosophy of Melancholy*, and last of all, attempted poetical suicide in the *Mythological Ode to the Spirit of Fire*.

The incidents of the story are, briefly, the desertion of Mengala by her husband Hidalvar ; his passion for the enchantress Rindane, who usurps her place ; Mengala's escape to her home ; her father's expedition to avenge her wrong ; the battle ; the death of Rindane ; the meeting of Hidalvar and his enemy, the intervention of the injured but forgiving wife, and a happy ending. The drama is peculiar among all Peacock's other works, with the possible exception of *Rhododaphne*, in having its main interest centered in the story. The plot is the most satisfactory that he ever constructed. It contains many dramatic and emotional possibilities ; it is coherent and interesting, and in the hands of an accomplished playwright might have become the vehicle of a weird story of enchantment, a psychological study or a drama of passion. But unfortunately Peacock was not the writer to do justice to the latent qualities of his con-

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ception. One of the causes of the total unsuitability of his play for the stage is its extreme shortness. It can hardly contain more than 850 lines, and out of this total 150 are accounted for in the lyrics. It is little more than a dramatic outline. The treatment is bare, the scenes are brief, the situations are undeveloped. Like all his writings it is carefully finished, and there is a sincerity and directness in the manner, making the reading pleasant and easy. But after turning over its forty small pages an impression is left, as of a complete history having been breathlessly poured into our ears, and leaving us astonished. It seems the story of little people, whose day and night succeed each other rapidly, whose emotions work quickly and have not time to ramify, whose speech is terse and limpid, and who have but an inkling of the complications of our life, with its diverse moods, long hesitations and fateful precipitancy. It is compressed drama—drama with its activities restricted and its promises unfulfilled.

Much as he loved the theatre, Peacock was never to make use of the dramatic form as a successful or characteristic medium of expression. He was to write better plays than this, but in a different style. In his two comedies is to be found the beginning of his work as a

satirical novelist. The *Circle of Loda* is a work of promise only in so far as he attains in it to a large measure of emancipation from his poetical trammels. He has genuinely conceived his subject, and consequently finds for it a far better vestment of expression than he could provide for those poems which were the outcome merely of reading and a desire to write correct and highly polished verse. In an eclectic edition of his works, excluding the mistaken efforts of his early years, which led up to nothing of subsequent interest or value, it might be possible to claim a place for this little dramatic sketch. For although in itself it possesses none of the characteristic excellences of his satirical writings, and is not jewelled with the fine lyrics which enhance the value of his later work, it is the first of his plays, and as such may be considered to be the very modest fountain-head of his best known productions in the art of conversation.

The stanzas *Remember Me* and the *Circle of Loda* were all that Peacock had to show for more than two years following the publication of *Palmyra*. These compositions could hardly have satisfied other people that he was making the best use of his time. If he made any money out of his first volume it must have been swal-

lowed up immediately by the Scotch tour. He was not leading the life of an author, nor had he any remunerative employment. He was by no means well off; but he was undoubtedly better contented to live without an advance in worldly position, at liberty to read and ramble at the bidding of his alternating moods, than to sacrifice his freedom in exchange for more money. Yet towards the autumn of 1808 he yielded to pressure on the part of some of his friends and accepted the post of under-secretary to Sir Hope Popham, then in command of H.M.S. *Venerable* on the Walcheren expedition. Family influence no doubt procured him this position. It did not take him long to discover that the ship was a "floating Inferno" on which it was impossible to write poetry or do "anything else which is rational." He writes "I would give the whole world now to be at home, and devote the whole winter to the writing of a comedy." He feels hopelessly out of his element, and inveighs in a rather petulant manner against the well-meant endeavours of his friends to procure advancement for him. England, he says, is the modern Carthage; and the worship of gold is grown to such an extent, that people cannot imagine any state of well-being unconnected with wealth. Still, he has to put up with

the sad business upon which he has started, at any rate for a time. In this strain he unburdens his soul to Hookham, who is now no longer addressed as "My dear Sir," but "My dear Edward." He sends "kindest remembrances to Tom"; by this time he is evidently an intimate of the family. Copious supplies of literature are ordered from the library, to cheer him in his uncongenial surroundings. The first batch includes Lewis' *Romantic Tales*, the *Romance of the Forest*, *The Ring and the Well*, *Adelmorn the Outlaw*, *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, and "something very elegantly *romantesque* in the poetical department, if you can find anything of that description which I have not yet seen." Thus at the age of twenty-two he was saturating himself in that kind of literature which a few years later became, and remained for a long period, the object of his most violent abuse. It is curious, too, to notice how in the next sentences of the letter from which we are now quoting (February 1809), he inquires tenderly after some of the authors whom he was very soon to do his best to ridicule and discredit. "Is another volume of Miss Baillie's tragedies forthcoming? Has Gifford undertaken to edit Beaumont and Fletcher? . . . What is Walter Scott about? Is anything

new expected from the pen of the incomparable Southey? How is poor Campbell? His lyre breathed the very soul of poetry: must it remain unstrung for ever?" Then come the writers whom he had never liked, or who had already disappointed him: "Is Wordsworth sleeping in peace on his bed of mud in the profundity of the Bathos, or will he again awake to dole out a lyrical ballad? His last work to all appearance has damned him irrecoverably. What is the last act of folly of Pratt, Mason, Miss Seward, Hayley, or any other of Phillips' formidable host of inanity?"

In March he writes a letter which cruelly throws the light of common day upon his own poetical attitude and method of composition. He begins, "I have been very busy with Forsyth's *Moral Science* and my own little poem of the Thames, which I have just finished, and now send to you such as it is." He then proceeds to discuss details of publication, and to rail against Carr's *Scotch Tour*, which he had just read. Having arrived at this point, he evidently turned over the pages of his poem again, and felt sudden compunction. He discovered that he had been guilty of "a horrible piece of Vandalism" in omitting to mention Runnymede and Cooper's Hill. He promptly composed passages referring



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to those places and copied them in a second post-script, adding, "One or two corrections are necessary throughout the poem, with regard to the recurrence of epithets." This is how he accounted in private for the local inspiration under which, in the opening stanzas of the poem, he claims to be writing. Yet his thoughts were truly with the Thames during the months of his hated employment on board the *Venerable*. It is evident that he believed, with his friends, that if he could have prevailed upon himself to stick to his work he would have attained to further advancement and profit. But by April, 1809, having been absent from home a little more than six months, he had had more than enough of it, and left his ship on the third of that month. A note scrawled hastily at Ramsgate announces that he had walked there from Deal, and intended to proceed next day round the North Foreland to Margate, and thence to Canterbury. So his first days ashore were spent in emphasising his freedom.

The *Genius of the Thames*, which he had imagined as done with, was to occupy him for some time to come. He had not been back at Chertsey long before he made up his mind that it was to be an extensive poem in two parts, and that in order to gather ideas for the accom-

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plishment of the larger design he would trace the course of the river from its source to Chertsey, "a very decent walk" of a hundred and eighty miles. Before starting he suffered a temporary disquietude on being told by some one that Tom Warton had written a poem on the Thames. This must have been an inaccurate description of *The Triumph of Isis*, a blame-worthy lucubration connected with the Isis of the pedants. By the end of May his arrangements for the trip were complete. The week-end is to be spent with Hookham in visiting Virginia Water, a haunt of theirs and a favourite spot with Peacock, then and always. "You will pass the Sunday with me at the Wheatsheaf," he writes, "and early on Monday morning, when you set off for London, I shall walk over to Slough and mount the rostrum of one of the Gloucestershire coaches."

On June 2nd he is at Cricklade, and for the moment at a standstill. He has come in for bad weather, with tempests of wind and rain. He is shocked that the peasants take no interest in the classic river, and cannot inform him which of the various streams which come together there is the Thames. "They are the most perfect set of Vandals I ever met with: in their vulgar ideas, the canal is the most interesting

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object." The parson, from whom correct information might possibly be obtained, is away on his honeymoon. The difficulty did not detain him long. Four days later he has attained his object and walked as far as Oxford, where he writes a letter giving a foretaste of his later style, and so characteristic, that it almost seems as if Thames Head, with its unsightly machinery, had been placed there in order to be discovered by Peacock and to awaken his satirical mood :

Thames Head is a flat spring, in a field about a mile from Tarlton, lying close to the bank of the Thames and Severn canal. This spring in the summer months is totally dry. None of our picturesque tourists appear to have asked themselves the question : How is it possible that a river which is perpetually flowing can rise from a source which is sometimes dry? The infant river in Kemble Meadow is never totally dry, and to the source by which the stream there is constantly supplied can alone belong the honour of giving birth to the Thames. But this spring, Thames Head, would never be totally dry, were it not for a monstrous piece of machinery erected near it, for the purpose of throwing up its water into the neighbouring canal. The Thames is about as good a subject for a satire as a panegyric. A satirist might exclaim : The rapacity of commerce, not content with the immense advantages derived from the river in a course of nearly three hundred miles, erects a ponderous engine on the very place of its nativity, to suck up its unborn waters from the bosom of the earth, and pump them into a navigable canal ! It were to be wished, after

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all, that the crime of water-sucking were the worst that could be laid to the charge of commercial navigation : but we have only to advert to the conduct of the Spanish Christians in South America, the English Christians in the East Indies, and to the Christians of all nations in the south of Africa, to discover the deeper die of its blood-sucking atrocities. A panegyrist, on the contrary, after expatiating on the benefits of commercial navigation, and of that great effort of human ingenuity, the Thames and Severn Canal, which ascends the hill, sinks into the vallies, and penetrates the bosom of the earth, to unite the two noblest rivers of this wealthy, prosperous, happy, generous, loyal, patriotic, &c., &c., &c., kingdom of England, might say : And yet this splendid undertaking would be incomplete, through the failure of water in the summer months, did not this noble river, this beautiful emblem, and powerful instrument of the commercial greatness of England, contribute to that greatness even at the moment of its birth, by supplying this magnificent chain of connection with the means of perpetual utility.

This is merely an unpublished conversation between Mr. Foster and Mr. Escot.

Before the end of June, Peacock was back in Chertsey, and remained there till the end of the year, finishing and correcting his poem. He promises more letters on the Thames when he can spare the time. If these were ever written they are not preserved, or not available. They would certainly be full of interest, which is more than can honestly be said of the poem, the nominal cause of the expedition. A valuable by-product has been wasted, something analo-

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gous, though on a smaller scale, to what might have been recorded if Drayton had kept a diary of his wanderings in search of materials for his *Polyolbion*.

The *Genius of the Thames* was a great trouble to Peacock. He worried because the second part was shorter than the first; then, because he could not find a good subject for an Episode; then he has hit upon a suitable theme in the fall of Carthage, to be introduced among "reflections on the mutability of Empire," a subject which he considers "highly susceptible of poetical ornament." He makes up his mind to finish the poem, provisionally, without an episode, leaving a place where one may or may not be inserted. Meanwhile he did not neglect his reading, which was as miscellaneous and desultory as usual. Among the books mentioned during these months are the *Description of Latium* by Cornelia Knight, Southey's *Joan of Ark*, Chateaubriand's *Atala*, Mme. Cotin's *Matilde*, Godwin's *Political Justice*, Cook *On Forest Trees*, Park's *Travels in Africa*, the *Remains of H. Kirke White*, Knight's *Progress of Civil Society*, part of Hume's history, and the dissertations of Locke and Bryant. Some of these were used for the purpose of manufacturing notes for his poems. Visits to Virginia

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Water were very salutary and refreshing during his struggle with the refractory poem and the learned authorities.

In *Palmyra* and the pieces accompanying it Peacock was seen composing on some of the favourite themes of the eighteenth century. Certain of these had been so commonly and regularly treated by the verse-writers that they may legitimately be considered as *genres*. If the *Riddle*, the *Rebus*, and the *Imitation of Horace* be omitted as unfair instances, there still remain a number of classic forms and subjects which were repeated from the early years of the century, down to the gradual suppression of the old conventions by the fresher and freer spirit of the great poets, whose revolutionary work is generally dated from the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*. Such well defined classes included the *Fable*, the *Ode*, the *Eclogue*, the *Anacreontic* (one of the most depressing as a rule), the *Elegy*, the *Inscription for a Grotto in Lord——'s Park*, the biblical paraphrase, the *Poem in the Manner of Spenser*. *The Ballad, or Lament, of the Betrayed Maiden* was exceedingly popular, especially if there was an unwelcome child, which she generally killed. Moreover, almost every versifier of the later age wrote pieces addressed to definite localities, classifiable

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as flattering, if the place in question were the seat of a friend or patron ; literary, if it were near the scene of any battle or important event, or if any author had lived in or near it ; or finally regretful, if it were a mere rural scene, river, hill or meadow. The function of the country was especially to bring back a poet's mind to his lost youth and to receive the facile overflowings of his sentiment on that subject. Not gazed upon so grossly, but inwardly contemplated, it was useful as a background for the descriptions of the ideal existence which the poet would desire to lead, alone with his charmer ; an existence satisfactorily employed by the elegant reading and walking indulged in by the gentleman, and for the lady, by the pure and blameless occupations of knitting and milking. It was also fashionable to write verses claiming to be " in the Eastern manner," or assuming great familiarity with eastern, northern or classical mythology.

Judged by its table of contents, *Palmyra* cannot be said to show any serious divergence from the writings of the previous age. Nor does an examination of the poems reveal much originality in the treatment of the old themes. A prolonged absence and complete change in habits and occupation, occurring as they did

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during two of the most impressionable years of a man's life, between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-three, might have been expected to leave remarkable and important traces in his writings immediately after the break in their continuity. Yet it is unlikely that any reader, not biassed by knowledge of the facts, would be able to detect any such influence at work in the *Genius of the Thames*. More ambitious and considerably more mature, it is yet of the same kind as the poems in the early volume. There is no alteration, but a distinct advance in style ; and this is all there is to suggest that Peacock had not passed from *Palmyra* to the later poem as tranquilly as he might lay aside a full sheet and take up a new one. It is on one of the old familiar themes, but on a much larger scale than anything he had attempted before.

His direct predecessors were illustrious, and the celebrity of their work, with the many imitations of it, had long caused these poems of locality to be regarded as a regular class by themselves among possible "poetical subjects." Definition would be difficult ; but we may perhaps adequately describe the Poem of Locality as a composition primarily descriptive, having for its subject some one spot, region or natural feature. It might be of almost any length,



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according to the extent and spaciousness of the chosen subject, the minuteness with which it was conceived at the time of writing, and the more or less latitude in the treatment. A sonnet, for instance, to the Thames at London will contain one thought, a prayer "for the safe Passage of his Mistress"; Spenser's *Prothalamion* takes in a long stretch of two rivers and contains elaborate descriptions. Beaumont's lines on the Tombs in Westminster Abbey are short, pointed and to a single purpose; so are Richard Corbett's *Upon Fairford Windows*. Carew went to Saxham in the winter, and being disgusted with the frost and snow, probably spent his time by the fire. The outcome is a bare little poem, setting forth with a wonderful terse exaggeration the hospitality of the house. Ben Jonson, writing with a full knowledge and personal love of Penshurst, describes the grounds in detail, the house and the owners of it, and introduces the episode of King James straying in the neighbourhood while hunting, and "dropping in" unexpectedly.

It would perhaps be far fetched to reckon the author of the *Ruins of Time* among Peacock's precursors in this genus of poetical composition. The poem is too purely elegiac, has too little description, and too soon leaves its first subject,

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to be considered as really typical of the kind. The true originators of the poem of locality in its extended form are Marvel, Denham (unimproved by Pope) and Dyer. Marvel roams from point to point, from view to view, in the estate round Nunappleton House, luxuriating in every sight which pleases the eye or suggests an image of beauty or a fantastic comparison. It is perhaps the most intensely local in feeling of all poems in the language, not excepting many by Drayton. Even its historical digression, dealing entirely with affairs of the place and of the family, seems to keep the grounds and buildings always in view : the rest is supplied by the poet's passionate delight in the fields and streams and woods, and by his fashionable attachment to strange symbolism and imagery. But Marvell's poem could only have been written for Nunappleton House ; and if it does not create the place for us, as a prose writer might be able to do by careful and detailed description, it yet creates the effect of the place, in its power of inspiring emotion, and contains unfading pictures of summer scenes in its meadows and parks.

*Cooper's Hill*, leaving aside the question of relative poetical excellence, is essentially different from *Nunappleton House*, in that the

scenery is presumed to be known to the reader, and that the places coming within its range are famous and historic. It has, too, for its subject a much wider sweep of country. Consequently there is in it far less description, which is hardly attempted in detail at all ; but there are copious extracts from the history of the country at large, making up, with a little moralising and a description, by way of episode, of a hunted stag, the substance of the poem. Pope, whose *Windsor Forest* is in imitation of this poem, cannot of course be counted as an originator ; but it is worth while noting that he put in an extra amount of vague and easy patriotism, hardened and pointed the descriptions, and added a mythological episode.

It remained for Dyer, both in the *Country Walk* and in the better known *Grongar Hill*, to introduce at least one new element into the poem of locality—the beauty of wild nature as opposed to that of parks and lawns. Though his poems contain a small share of moralising, the main subject is the scenery for its own sake, and not for the sake of personal associations or historic memories connected with it. His contribution to the *genre* is a fuller, a more careful though compressed description, accompanied by a depth of emotion which makes his work poetry :

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Ever charming, ever new,  
When will the landscape tire the view ?  
The fountain's fall, the river's flow,  
The woody valleys, warm and low,  
The windy summit, wild and high,  
Roughly rushing on the sky !

And although he began *The Ruins of Rome* with the words "Enough of Grongar !" they only prove that he was unduly lacking in gratitude to its Muse ; for he never surpassed or equalled the little poem written a dozen years before. The Roman work betrays no local feeling, and though it grows to an unwieldy length its descriptions are entirely negligible, historical reminiscences and moral generalisations forming its substance and, if it have any, its soul.

From this time (1740) onwards, poems on places continued to be produced, but without adding any fresh quality to the common stock. Its popularity increased as its vitality diminished. Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey* belongs to an entirely different class. Though it begins like one of these poems and contains a little descriptive writing, it is in reality a personal utterance, a "confession," and might have been evoked by almost any scene so revisited, after an absence which had brought change and development to the poet's inner life. But Wordsworth had been touched by influences which had passed Peacock

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by. His *Genius of the Thames* must be considered as a composition in the old style, belonging to this well-defined class. As he mockingly said of a reviewer that he had made the best possible criticism of a new work, because his article contained all the jokes made by his predecessors, so this poem might have won praise for uniting all the qualities of its kind.

To the first edition there was prefixed a short introductory ode, a fair example of Peacock's technical attainments as a verse-writer. Opening with a lament for the golden age, when dryads and genii haunted the countryside, it is in a lyrical key throughout, in the tone of Tasso's "O bell' età dell' oro!" These ethereal beings vanished when mankind became corrupt and introduced war, cruelty and crime to the once innocent life of the fields. Peacock was one of the last poets to sing of the country in this style. He was also one of the best. He returns to the country, he tells us, not for any new or mystical message it may have for him, but because in its most congenial scenes he can catch glimpses of the rural deities. His mood in the presence of wild nature is always that of Wordsworth's "The world is too much with us." He valued contemporary progress and civilisation very little, and felt that modern men had given their

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hearts away. It was precisely for sights to make him "less forlorn" that he sought solitude: in his love of nature was embodied his love of the past. But it was not alone for this that he loved the Thames. He loved it too for its own beauty and associations, as the river by whose banks most of his life had been spent; its neighbourhood was delightful to him, and on its waters he never tired of rowing and sailing.

Unfortunately his poetical ideas and emotional experiences were kept in separate and unconnected departments of his mind. His poem is a deliberate and conventional fabrication on a theme which, however dear to him in reality, was not permitted to become the source of any genuine inspiration. From beginning to end it suggests no personal relation to his subject, no adequate cause for his lyricism. We will not follow him through his amplification of "Oh, could I flow like thee"; his flattery of the stream for the scenery on its banks, for its position as chief river of the land of Freedom, for the wealth of its port; his comparison of it with other rivers; his ancient Roman-British episode. His reverence for tradition at Godstowe, for learning at Oxford, for literature at "Twit'nam," shall be taken for granted. "Let Fancy lead," he says, when engaged upon the

contemplation of the river's course, from its spring, where "through brilliant green Thy infant waters softly creep," all the way to the confluence with the Medway and the "giant-sire's embrace." But why, we may not unjustifiably ask, should Fancy be called upon to lead? The author had walked it. The only answer is, that he was writing a poem of a certain type, and a thousand such walks would not be allowed to interfere with its form or traditions. Experience was to be kept rigidly in its place as a modest contributor to the stock of ideas, so long as what it had to offer would fit into the poetical scheme, and as a useful check on mere fine writing. Still it is certainly responsible for a few lines occurring at this point, whose absence would rob the poem of a piece of true observation and delicate description :

Where Kemble's wood-embosomed spire  
 Above the tranquil valley swells ;  
 Where wild-flowers wave, in rich attire,  
 Their pendent cups and starry bells ;  
 In fields, with softest beauty bright,  
 Thy crystal sources rise to light ;  
 While many an infant Naiad brings  
 The treasures of her subject springs :  
 And simply flows thy new-born stream,  
 Where brighter verdure streaks the meads,  
 Half veiled from the meridian beam  
 By spear-grass tall and whispering reeds.

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But it is immediately pocketed again, and there follows a passage in which the course of the river is considered as emblematic of a lifetime, the mystery of the future and the transitoriness of possessions and civilisations. The poem closes with ancient and honourable reflections on the flight of time.

Six years of new and varied experience were to pass before the writing of *Headlong Hall*. Yet even so, a reader who knew Peacock only in his novels might excusably refuse to believe that this was his work. The disillusioned critic is here shown as a respectful and gullable follower of tradition. His occasional success is accidental and owing to qualities which he thought negligible and effects which he did not aim at producing.

The second part is of very dubious value to the whole. The additional length can hardly be counted as a benefit, since it introduces no really new idea, and the description of the river, which might have brought refreshment, is minimised. Indeed the artist's hand trembled more here than in the first, and it contains some repetitions, both of itself and of earlier passages, which the poem, in spite of its length, is too highly polished to stand. Isolated passages are readable, but not markedly superior to similar patches in the



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first part, while the general tone is certainly no higher. It is significant of the author's poetics that some of his best work was the least satisfactory to him. The stanza quoted above, for instance, describing the infant Thames, was actually altered in the second edition, and made to resemble more closely than it did before some lines in Ariosto, to the manifest loss, not of euphonic beauty, his main object, but of fidelity and pictorial effect.

It is difficult at the present day to treat the *Genius of the Thames* with the serious consideration bestowed upon it by contemporary critics. It has an elaborate finish and includes passages which if not original are still fresh and genuine. But as a whole it was stale before it was written. It will perhaps be a help toward putting ourselves in tone with the time, just a hundred years ago, to remember that in this year was produced Scott's edition of Dryden. In this work the criticism is summed up and rounded off on the last page of the Life by the assertion that Dryden was the greatest poet from Shakespeare to the time of writing. It is probable that in a great productive age the artists are always in advance of the critics: it is certainly amusing, and almost instructive, to observe the attitude of the literary gentlemen of 1810 towards the

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works which they were called upon to appraise. The *British Critic*, in a retrospect of the books reviewed during the last half of the year, singles out for special praise the Earl of Carysfort, who receives a twofold gratulation, first on his high poetic achievement, and second "because we are happy to know that the private virtues of the noble writer are at least equal to his literary attainments." In the review of his volume on another page it is said that *The Bower of Melissa* "possesses every requisite which ought to characterise a composition of this kind," and that it "will endure a comparison with the best effusions of the kind, either from Dryden or Pope." The *British Critic*, therefore, though he has shaken our confidence not a little by his extravagance, is yet true to his principles of taste in stating that *The Genius of the Thames* "claims very high and almost unqualified applause." He blames the author's warmth of imagination for leading him into some expressions "that will not bear the test of sound [*i.e.* verbal] criticism." There were many other reviews of the poem, but all the writers approach it in the same attitude. Its substance and stylistic basis are taken for granted, and linguistic criticism is alone indulged in. The author is rebuked for using the epithet "thirst-crazed," and he is warned that the phrase

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“ah, sure” is beneath the dignity of lyrical poetry. The one exception is the notice in *The Satirist*, which devotes a whole page to explaining that the work is wrongly described in the subtitle as lyrical, because it is too long and contains an episode.

Rumours and copies of these criticisms reached Peacock in Wales, whither he had betaken himself at the beginning of 1810. The first budget, he writes, has “almost metamorphosed me into a conceited coxcomb: but the leaden mace of a reviewer will restore me to my senses.” When the mace descended he did not like it, though he affects indifference. “*The Satirist*, I perceive, has done his best to pulverise me, and has brayed me without mercy in his leaden mortar. Lord help him! The fellow’s ignorance is almost equal to his malevolence.” This he proves from the reviewer’s misuse of a classical quotation, and proceeds somewhat grandiloquently: “I shall adopt Hume’s plan, and never reply in any manner to any attack that may be made upon me. . . . I think silent contempt is in these cases the most effectual weapon.” Meanwhile the letters from Wales, covering about eight months, throw considerable light on this important period, whose influences and experiences had lasting effects on his life and gave him

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material for some of the finest portions of his fiction. For instance, almost the first name to occur is that of Tremadoc, immediately calling to mind the embankments, one of them finished and the other in process of building at this time, the subject of a passage of stately beauty in *Headlong Hall*. The Traeth Mawr embankment was approaching completion. It had been built simultaneously from each end, and only a narrow gap remained in the middle. The scene which enchanted the three philosophers of his first novel was precisely that which Peacock was one of the last visitors to see. His interest in the subject of embankments being thus awakened, he was led to study the tradition of the inundation of Gwaelod, which he used as the foundation of the first part, really the prologue, of *The Misfortunes of Elphin*. The rugged woodland country completely satisfied his prevailing mood. He became intimate with it, attached to it; and it is such scenery that he introduces most often and with the best effect in his tales.

In January he has arrived at Maentwrog, eight miles from Tremadoc, and has taken the only available lodgings. "This is a delightful spot," he writes, "enchanting even in the gloom of winter: in summer it must be a terrestrial paradise. It is a beautiful narrow vale, several

miles in length, extending in one direction to the sea, and totally embosomed in mountains, the sides of which are covered in many parts with large woods of oak. My sitting-room has a bow-window, looking out on a lovely river which flows through the vale. In the vicinity are many deep glens, along which copious mountain streams of inconceivable clearness roar over rocky channels, and numerous waterfalls of the most romantic character." There were only seven houses in the place, which yet boasted a lawyer, a doctor and a parson, described as a "little dumpy, drunken mountain-goat," and drawn upon subsequently for the characters of Dr. Gaster and the parsons of *Calidore*.

The next letter, written a month later, encloses an order for about thirty volumes in the five languages that he habitually read, and contains a short descriptive passage, afterwards almost reproduced in the rhymed couplets of the *Philosophy of Melancholy*, and echoed, nearly twenty years later, in the third stanza of the "Brilliancies of Winter" in the *Misfortunes of Elphin*: "I wish I could find language sufficiently powerful to convey to you an idea of the sublime magnificence of the waterfalls in the frost—when the old overhanging oaks are spangled with icicles; the rocks sheeted

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with frozen foam, formed by the flying spray ; and the water that oozes from their sides congealed into innumerable pillars of crystal." He was looking forward to a visit from Hookham at the end of the opera season, and remarks that they will then be able to "crack an egg" together, "a more philosophical operation than *cracking a bottle*."

This last phrase may appear startling to the majority of Peacock's readers, among whom there seems to be a general idea that he was given to excessive drinking. It may be as well to review at this point what little evidence there is for the assumption. It is found to rest chiefly on the orgies of eating and drinking described with such gusto in the novels. The reasoning, whether explicit or not, can generally be analysed and reduced to the really incoherent argument : "How well and how fondly Peacock describes bacchanalian scenes ! He must have been a rare drinker himself !" Now it is obvious that the same logic would lead to the conclusion that Peacock was himself an example of not only gluttony and debauchery, but of religious intolerance and insincerity, political pigheadedness and quackery, artistic cant, philosophical flummery, financial knavery, social jealousy and ambition, literary priggishness and dis-

honesty, in fact, all the qualities which furnish objectives for his satire: he who ridicules drunkards must himself be drunk. No time need be wasted in refuting this argument. Yet it is only just to set against it, as an appeal to readers who judge wholly by the evidence of the novels, the consideration that most of the characters with whom Peacock associates his own opinions and practice—perhaps all with the exception of Dr. Folliott, who, though a personal favourite, was yet a member of that profession for which Peacock had but scant respect—are the soberest members of the party. Again, in the fragment of *Calidore*, the drunkenness and gluttony of the Welsh clergymen is presented as unaccompanied by any redeeming quality. And in a strange little poem written on taking leave of Wales, and railing at the unenlightened society of Merionethshire, such lines occur as “Bacchus reels through all thy fields, Her brand fanatic frenzy wilds, And ignorance with falsehood dwells, And folly shakes her jingling bells,” and again “Long as disgusted virtue flies From folly, drunkenness and lies: Long as insulted science shuns The steps of thy degraded sons.” In these lines, written in the spirit of Herrick’s *Dean Bourn Farewell*, and other verses similarly reprobating the Devonshire

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people, Peacock is speaking directly and simply, and not masking his sentiments in ironic form. He here shows that he considers the conduct of the parsons of *Calidore* and other devotees of the bottle to be as disgusting as it is ridiculous.

Turning to personal evidence, the first and perhaps the strongest is the phrase just quoted from his letter to Hookham. The next in order is Mary Shelley's illiberal and bad-natured reference to his dining every evening at Bishopgate "to drink his bottle." She accuses him of bad temper, boasts that she does not speak to him, and would surely have been only too glad to add the sin of drunkenness to swell her grievance, if he had given her the smallest chance. Her silence therefore is eloquent. In his diary, written at a time between the composition of *Nightmare Abbey* and *Maid Marian*, are found such disgraceful entries as "Went in the boat to Robin's Island with some cold lamb and ale and the *Dionysiaca*"; and one morning, after a day similarly spent on the river "with Nonnus," he writes, "Very ill this morning, which I attribute to the combination of ale and heat. Speculate on drinking water." It would be difficult to construe these jottings as confessions of excess, though the second might delight the teetotallers. Sir Edward Strachey, who knew



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Peacock about the time that *Crotchet Castle* was written, says that he was in the habit of talking as if he were much attached to good living, though the only incident he ever noticed tending to prove this attachment was, that Peacock once ate a sweet which he knew was likely to disagree with him. This evidence is very important, for in *Crotchet Castle* more than in any of his books he seems to glorify eating and drinking. Still later Robert Buchanan, who knew him in his old age, says that he enjoyed a good dinner, but that he spent as little time as possible over it, and that the strongest drink they had together was cowslip wine made by his adopted daughter; though Peacock told Thackeray about the same time that his favourite wine was Madeira. One of his latest writings, contributed to *Fraser's Magazine* within a few weeks of his seventy-second birthday—when, some might say, he ought to have known better—was the article called “The *Flask* of Cratinus,” the avowed theme of which is “the dependence of good poetry on good liquor.” Ancient drunkards are here warmly eulogised, and the writer manifests a boyish delight in the fact that Æschylus introduces Jason and his companions “gloriously drunk” on the stage. If severe moralists will not listen to the plea that this

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piece is a playful exhibition of curious learning, they must accept the discriminating fact that he quotes Lord Monboddo on the advisability of mixing water with wine, and concludes with the advice : Be sober.

Thus the evidence, such as it is, all points to one conclusion, that Peacock was a moderate man ; and this is confirmed by what we know of his tastes and pursuits. A man so constantly engaged in active physical exercise and hard study cannot have had much time left for " cultivating the bottle." Allowance must of course be made for the change in habits which has taken place in the last hundred years, and no attempt is here made to prove that Peacock was what would now be called a very moderate drinker. No doubt he was as good a judge of a bottle of wine as any gentleman in the kingdom, and would have been the first to take offence if his qualification in that respect had been questioned. If we could see him among the company which he had in his mind's eye when describing some of the dinners and diners in his books, we should probably put him down as a good drinker, surrounded by companions most of whom were drunkards.

But to return to Maentwrog. The next letter is long and full of information. He has evidently

made up his mind to stay for some time in his present quarters, as he has sent to London for the greater part of his books and clothes, which had been left behind until he should have found a suitable spot to settle in. While he is without his belongings he is exploring the neighbourhood with great minuteness ; exactly as Mr. Chain-mail in *Crotchet Castle*, pending the arrival of the captain with a parcel of books from London, spends his time in penetrating the intricacies of the mountain valleys. Moreover, as that gentleman met Miss Susannah during this interval of exploration, so it was in the early part of his time at Maentwrog that Peacock met Miss Jane. He is said to have described her as Anthelia ; he obviously painted her as Susannah. In the unfinished *Cotswold Chace*, which may have been written at almost any date after *Crotchet Castle*, but is probably much later, the same girl is portrayed ; the blue gown and black hat and feather are again insisted upon, and no doubt were the principal features in Miss Gryffydd's usual costume. Richard Cotswold thus describes his fair neighbour : " She dresses almost always in very fine cloth, usually blue, with a black hat and feather, and very neat boots, laced over a small and very pretty foot. She wears no crinoline and, if I might venture

to devine, no stays. In short she is like a Greek statue, only in thicker but still fine and graceful drapery ; and all her movements are graceful. Her features are as regular as sculpture could make them. Her complexion is, I imagine, naturally fair, but slightly embrowned by air and exercise ; and there is over it a pure roseate glow of health, that makes her literally radiant. Her hair is very fine, and slightly darker than her eyes, which are hazel ; and there is a brilliancy of expression about them that seems to emanate from a very high order of mind. Her voice in speaking is at once soft and full, sweet and distinct, the natural articulation of graceful and unruffled thoughts. I imagine that she sings and that her singing voice is no less charming." Everything in these letters is redolent of the novels. *Crotchet Castle* is again recalled by his descriptions of the scenery. He quotes here one of the bardic triads, placed afterwards at the head of the sixth chapter in the *Misfortunes of Elphin*. One passage is peculiarly remarkable, relating an adventure of his future father-in-law, afterwards inserted, with variations, in *Headlong Hall*. It deserves to be told in his own words :

"The other day I prevailed on my new acquaintance, Dr. Gryffydd, to accompany me at midnight to the 'Black Cataract,' a favourite

haunt of mine, about two and a half miles from here. Mr. Lloyd, whom I believe I have mentioned to you more than once, volunteered to be of the party; and at twenty minutes past eleven, lighted by the full-orbed moon, we sallied forth, to the no small astonishment of mine host, who protested he never expected to see us all again. The effect was truly magnificent. The water descends from a mountain glen down a winding rock, and then precipitates itself in one sheet of foam over its black base into a capacious bason, the sides of which are almost perpendicular and covered with hanging oak and hazel. Evans, in the *Cambrian Itinerary*, describes it as an abode of damp and horror, and adds that the whole cataract cannot be seen in one view, as the sides are too steep and slippery to admit of climbing up, and the top of the upper fall is invisible from below. Mr. Evans seems to have laboured under a small degree of alarm, which prevented accurate investigation, for I have repeatedly climbed this *unattemptsable* rock and obtained this *impossible* view; as he or any one else might do with very little difficulty; though Dr. Gryffyd the other night, trusting to a rotten branch, had a fall of fifteen feet perpendicular, and but for an intervening hazel would infallibly have been hurled to the bottom.

But a similar mistake is not likely to occur in daylight."

Every reader of the novels will remember the fall of Mr. Cranium from the tower. The parallel is closer than appears at first sight. Dr. Gryffydd's fall was caused by the breaking of a branch ; that of Mr. Cranium by the giving way of a tuft of ivy. Dr. Gryffydd was saved by a hazel bush ; Mr. Cranium owed at least the gentleness of his descent to the same plant, and Peacock, who had in fact led his future father-in-law into danger, represents himself in the novel as saving him. Escot, who marries the beautiful Cephalis, is Peacock, who went through that ceremony with the beautiful Jane more than once in fiction, both before and after doing so in reality. It is probably, therefore, not too far-fetched to see in the enthusiastic Mr. Cranium a caricature of Dr. Gryffydd holding forth on some favourite subject.

In these letters, too, is the first mention of "Mary Ann," about whom very little can be known or even inferred, but who certainly was a person of no little importance in Peacock's life a few years later. It appears even that at one time he had thoughts of marrying her. From his writing to Hookham and calling her merely by her Christian names, it may be that she was a

sister of his friend. Miss Gryffydd is also mentioned, though not by name: "The Cærnarvonshire nymph, whom I once mentioned to you, pleased me by talking of Scipio and Hannibal and the Emperor Otho. It is now a month since I saw her, and Richard is himself again." The last letter of the series was full of information for his correspondent, but without the commentary derived from others, now lost or unavailable, it tells us little, except that Peacock had been seriously ill and was not yet quite recovered. From a letter quoted by Dr. Garnett we learn that he was still in the same neighbourhood in the early part of the following year. He has just bidden adieu to the Cærnarvonshire nymph, who has resumed her ascendancy, and is once more not himself.

The principal outcome of this sojourn was another elaborate poem, *The Philosophy of Melancholy*, published about a year after he left Wales, that is to say, in the early part of 1812. The title contains a promise which is more than half a threat. It may reasonably be hoped that the substance of this poem will offer more interest to the modern reader than anything Peacock had yet written. The theme, theoretical and speculative but at the same time intimate, was likely to inspire him to a sincerer

and more personal utterance. And in fact *The Philosophy of Melancholy*, the last of Peacock's early works, is the only one in which he reveals himself. The letters to Hookham contain documentary evidence to prove, for instance, that in his descriptions of Welsh scenery he is painting faithfully from memory. More important still is a passage, unique in its introspective tone, bearing strong testimony to his prevailing moodiness of temper and showing that the melancholy of the poem was a habitual affection of his mind. "There is more truth than poetry in the remark of Wordsworth that 'as high as we have mounted in delight, in our dejection do we sink as low.' You saw this exemplified in me last summer, when I was sometimes skipping about the room, singing and playing all sorts of ridiculous antics, and at others doling out staves of sorrow, and meditating on daggers and laurel-water. Such is the disposition of all votaries of the muses, and in some measure of all metaphysicians: for the sensitive and the studious are generally prone to melancholy, and the melancholy are usually subject to intervals of boisterous mirth. Poor Cowper was a lamentable instance, and Tasso and Collins and Chatterton—a list that might be prolonged almost *ad infinitum*. I do



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not mean to say that the effects of this morbid disposition are always so fatally exemplified as in the four I have mentioned, of whom three were driven to insanity and one to suicide. Cratinus, Democritus, Horace and others have opined that a certain degree of *noncompositus* is essential to the poetic character : and I am inclined to think there is considerable justice in the observation."

In this poem Peacock is still a slave, but the more congenial theme allows him a greater degree of liberty in sentiment, if not in its expression. It has been remarked that in the *Thames* he did his best to banish experience and called upon a too pedestrian fancy to take its place. Here on the contrary he is bold enough to say : " I was alone in the mountains of Merionethshire, and observed the woods and waterfalls in their changes with the different seasons and weathers." This distinction may not at first seem sufficiently important to call for much emphasis. But in Peacock's case it marks far more than a difference in form ; it shows a change in aim and feeling, resulting partly from two years' growth and partly from the choice of a happier theme. It is safe to say that two years before respect for the proprieties would have rendered impossible the direct personal expression of sentiment which,

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sparingly introduced in this poem, is yet its life.

To hunt for external causes explaining the stages of a mind's development is a thankless task. The only perfectly safe interpretation of such phenomena is that they happened because it was time for them to happen—that the plant flowered in its season, and withered or bore fruit according to its nature. Some circumstances may be pointed out as exerting an influence on the life of the mind; but the discovery of sufficient causes to account for all subsequent growth and expansion is the ambition of a pedant and the superstition of the unimaginative. The scenery of North Wales may, or rather must have had something to do with Peacock's development, yet as far back as we know anything of him he was always devoted to scenery. Why should the Welsh hills have supplied him with just that impulse which the Thames valley all his life, and especially in 1809, had failed to provide? It is useless to ask. Probably by his own growth he was ready to receive the influence and happened to receive it in Wales. Probably too his solitude was greater at that time than ever before. Another factor clamours for the title of *causa efficiens*—Jane Gryffydd! Yes, because we happen to know about her.

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But few men live to the age of twenty-eight without having been in love, or at least without having their emotions and imagination stirred by one or more women. Few who are at all deeply emotional reveal these inner disturbances of their peace unless they go far and seem to portend consequences: none so reticent as Peacock do. More than a general and theoretical importance therefore must be conceded to the fact that we know this was not his first love affair. The earliest is supposed to have been an attachment, mentioned by all the writers on his life but explained by none, to a girl whom he knew in Chertsey, which, his granddaughter states, was the most lasting and influential of his life.

The spirit of this poem has somewhat inaccurately been called pessimism by a modern writer: it would be better described as contemplativeness. It is that of a disillusioned man, but it is no barren brooding, productive of nothing and ending in despair or cynicism. It is far removed from the indefinite grief of the typically minor poet, the vague sorrow, the professional attitude of suffering, which takes some subject as a text, and proceeds to point out that in spite of its beauty and charm, it has no power to heal a lacerated heart or restore the delight and innocence of youthful years.

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It is of a more intellectual type, keen and positive; that spirit which, either from disappointment or distaste for what is commonly called the life of the world, turns, not to brood but to find consolation and delight in the solitude of nature, in history and philosophy. He describes the scenery which had captivated him two years before. He cherished an affectionate memory of the Welsh mountains, his impressions of them were vivid and lasting. In these lines he succeeds in imparting to the local names some of the haunting sweetness which they had for him. His pleasure at the sight of the waterfalls in frosty weather is remembered :

The sheeted foam, the falling stream beneath,  
Clothed the high rocks with frost-work's wildest  
wreath :

Round their steep sides the arrested ooze had  
made

A vast, fantastic, crystal colonnade :

The scattering vapour, frozen ere it fell,  
With mimic diamonds spangled all the dell,  
Decked the gay woods with many a pendent  
gem,

And gave the oak its wintry diadem.

The same philosophy applied to painting and music leads to the remark, that the invariably melancholy character of primitive music is perhaps answerable for the early belief in its power over nature, illustrated in legends such

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as that of Orpheus. Eight years later he wrote that these were only "metaphors for the faculty of leading multitudes by the nose." The reader is at liberty to think either or both of these explanations sincere.

The next subject is melancholy in its personal and social aspect. Here occurs another of those intimate paragraphs, so rare in Peacock's writings. As this poem has never been reprinted some lines may be quoted here, not, in the words of Peacock's first editor, "as a specimen of poetry particularly excellent," but for their biographical interest. They contain the first mention of Jane Gryffyd in his published works, perhaps indeed the only one that it is well nigh impossible to query or refer to some one else. So little having been reported of this lady's character and disposition, it is interesting to note that she had, according to her admirer, a melancholic temperament. He refers to her in the approved manner :

That fair form, ah, now too far remote,  
Whose glossy locks on ocean-breezes float ;  
That tender voice, whose rapture-breathing  
    thrill,  
Unheard so long, in fancy vibrates still ;  
That Parian hand, that draws, with artless fire,  
The soul of music from her mountain lyre ;  
and adds :

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The plaintive minstrel's legendary strain  
One added power of softest charm shall gain,  
When she, whose breast thy purest fount  
supplies,  
Bids thy own songs, oh melancholy ! rise.

The last section justifies the poet's attitude towards life and its pleasures, and so leads up to his moral acceptance of the laws of nature and faith in mankind. The effects of vicissitude are demonstrably good ; we must therefore believe in the wisdom and necessity of constant change. But the pleasure-seeker perishes through these very circumstances : the qualities which they call for and develop are virtue, genius and courage. There are abundant examples of these in the records of antiquity. We, who possess the additional advantages of revealed truth and scientific knowledge, ought to surpass the ancients in their excellences. Thus the fabrication of decorous poetry led Peacock into a very slush of insincerity. What he thought of revealed religion may be read in his prose works *passim*. If satirical writings be not accepted in evidence, appeal may be made to two of his favourite books, *Ancient Metaphysics*, an avowed object of which was to revive the deism of later classical times, and *Academical Questions*, whose author was at heart an atheist.

The careful elaboration bestowed upon *The Philosophy of Melancholy* was worthy of a more important subject. Partly didactic and partly a personal confession, composed in a placid flowing style, it has neither the argumentative passion of Lucretius nor the antithetic procedure of Pope. It passes on from one illustration to another, from one allusion to the next, setting forth the theme in a series of pictures. From many points of view it shows distinct improvement on *The Genius of the Thames*. There is still a too great profusion of epithets, but they are now more telling and less conventional. The heroic couplet has seldom been handled with greater art. From end to end of the poem it is well nigh impossible to find a rough or unmusical line. But the rhythms are slow: there is too much attempt at stately movement, naively enough often by enclosing between commas phrases that might quite well run on. The very faultlessness of the metre is by no means an unmixed blessing, since everything else is sacrificed to it. Style was the chief if not the only preoccupation; consequently there is little to say about the poem except that it is highly correct, its weakness lying in the epithets and its peculiarity in the use of hyphenated words. Peacock's fondness for these had already appeared

sufficiently strongly to call forth the wrath of the critics. But he did not repent, and now used them more frequently and with greater effect. His is something more than a mere habit of joining together by means of a hyphen words which are generally written either separately or in one. The hyphen is one of the few means at our disposal for evading or supplementing the grossness of grammatical speech. When two words are written together as one the accent is lost to one or the other, and this partner consequently loses its full share in the meaning. But when they are skilfully hyphenated each keeps all its stress and all its meaning: something new is really added to their suggestive power, and the impression they make is more than the sum of each of their values. Peacock was alive to the advantage to be obtained from this manipulation and bringing together of words. He was so fond of it that he used it excessively; and though it may not be easy to point out why "fairy grove" is left unjoined and "laurel-shade" occurring in the next line is hyphenated, yet such expressions as "His (Calude's) evening-valleys and his weed-twined fanes" and "Her glance, quick-turned towards the note" make a very definite impression, and may serve to illustrate the peculiar



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effect which Peacock strove to produce by using this means so frequently in his poems. The smooth flow of the verse comes nearer to being interrupted by some of these couplings than at any other moments. But it has a monotony of beauty which holds the attention of the ear while failing to satisfy the other faculties. It is a reed of melodious but insufficiently varied tone, and though the playing is always skilful it is at moments of emotion only that the music can interest those who listen for something more significant than quality of sound. Such moments are more frequent in this than in any of his earlier writings. It is a work of his own mood and genius. He found both subject and illustration in his own heart. Here he has enshrined his three early and constant loves, of nature, of books and of a woman. He has made a declaration of ideals and tastes. Yet all these vital qualities are laid to rest in the coffin of the diction and the tomb of mannerism. As a poet Peacock has to be diligently sought out ; those passages must be discovered where he is expressing himself simply and sincerely, from among a much larger number which he wrote for various trivial reasons, to imitate what pleased him, to deck his literary discoveries in an ornamental robe, to satisfy the requirements of

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an unfortunate convention. Although psychologically *The Philosophy of Melancholy* is a genuine utterance of the man himself, it belongs artistically to the second category.

## IV

### BEGINNINGS OF SATIRE

**T**HE *Philosophy of Melancholy* was the last of what may be called, for the sake of convenience, Peacock's eighteenth century poems. With the publication of this work his first period, already too long, comes definitely to an end. He had come near to perfecting himself in the style while freeing himself by degrees, though never nearly enough, from the limitations which that age imposed upon its writers. Yet had he written no verse except those seriously laboured productions, we should be justified in saying that the first seven years of his literary career were devoted to the complete statement of his only illusion, namely, that he was a poet.

By his seven years of bondage he earned an unexpected reward. One of his pseudo-classical studies was the means of introducing him to the man who applied to it a vital criticism and to his intellect just that impulse that was needed to incite him to something better. At this

point of his life he encountered its greatest influence, resulting in his being henceforth true to himself, cultivating sincerely his true genius and no longer resting satisfied with the elaboration of ornamental commonplace. Devoted scholar as he was, he learned as readily from humanity and from nature as from books. His sojourn in Wales and his friendship with Shelley contributed to his intellectual stock elements more vital and fruitful than anything he had gathered from his reading. From this time he ceased to invoke dryads by the Thames and to desire a population of oreads for the Cambrian hills. He regretted as keenly as ever the heroic ages of the world and the classical spirit in literature : he made no truce with the present. But he attempted no more to recall the "sacred influence" by writing of the English woodlands as of the groves of Arcady. A ripening knowledge of life and a constantly increasing familiarity with antiquity would co-operate in imparting to him a clearer vision. Both would teach him that to write of contemporary life and personal experience in the manner of a prize copy of Latin verse only brings about a false and unclassical confusion ; that walking tours are not to be rendered poetical by mythological treatment ; above all, that to adopt the style of an outworn

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unreal poetical tradition was no true antidote to what he considered the vicious and trivial manner of the new school. Henceforward he wrote mythologically of a mythological time in the world's history, and satisfied his longing for heroic imagery and setting by the study and reproduction of the events of a legendary age. He transferred the antiquity from his epithets to his plots. He tended more and more to treat his own time satirically, in prose and verse, while writing a greater number of those small poems, lyrics, ballads and catches, which do not seem at the present day to belong to any particular age, and by their freshness in spite of the changes in taste and fashion have made a fair bid for immortality.

A few such pieces had already been written during the past six years, and are among the poems of Peacock which will find a place in posterity's final selection from his work. The first is indubitably *Beneath the Cypress Shade*, and the next *Al mio Primiero Amore*. The simplicity of the verse and its perfect adaptation to the form of thought is such that it is impossible to imagine the statement being made in any other way. Flowing in rhythm, clear in phrasing, terse and restrained in language, these little pieces are telling in every line and half line.

But what gives to these and other of Peacock's lyrics their peculiar charm and excellence is, besides their genuine poetic emotion, his gift of perfect adequacy in expression. At his best he never oversteps or falls short of the complete statement of his thought, and any one of the songs and ballads in which he attains to this high standard would be sufficient to prove that he was a poet of far finer qualities than those he had displayed up to this time in his longer poems. Most of the verses written subsequently to these he found means to insert into his novels. The best of those not so published belong to the later periods of his life. Among these should be mentioned *Margaret Love Peacock* (1826), an inscription for the grave of his four-year-old daughter; *Rich and Poor, or, Saint and Sinner* (1831); and *Newark Abbey*, written in 1842 in remembrance of the events of thirty-five years before. *Castles in the Air* and *On Callers* are both extremely characteristic.

The fragment of *Ahrimanes* is undated; but there is extremely strong evidence, both internal and circumstantial, almost proving that it was not begun before 1813, when Peacock made the acquaintance of that eccentric individual on whose pet theories the poem is founded: and the latest year which could with any show of

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reason be proposed as the date of its composition would be 1819, when, the company that brought them together having been broken up some time since, the intercourse in all probability came to an end. Sir Henry Cole, who is as a rule so careful and accurate, must have been misinformed about this work. He can hardly have seen it, for he describes it as the first canto in an unfinished condition; whereas the fragment in reality consists of the first canto complete in thirty stanzas, and fourteen stanzas of a second. This inaccuracy may make us the less chary of disbelieving his statement that it was written in 1810, one of the few years out of the whole of Peacock's life about which we have a good deal of knowledge.

In his early works Peacock inclines to an unruffled, conventional patriotism and an equally vague and respectable religious attitude. In comparison with these, *Ahrimanes* is almost a song of revolt. The lines already noticed at the end of the *Philosophy of Melancholy*, containing the ethical conclusion to be drawn from the poem, and followed by those declaring that all things proceed from God, contain nothing out of keeping with his previous writings, published or unpublished. If these be compared with *Ahrimanes* it will be difficult to believe that

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they were composed after it. Is it true, he asks in *Ahrimanes*, that an evil influence rules the world? that the man whose life is passed in toil and darkness, the slave of ambition, the thrall of superstition, all alike in their prayers and sacrifices call only on this power of ill? Is there a single spot on earth where fraud, corruption, selfishness and pride do not wear the "specious robes of sanctity" to enable them to break the natural bonds of love and peace? where "idle tales, that truth and sense deride, Claim no dominion o'er the subject soul?" Such a region may exist, where the good influence still reigns;

But not in fanes where priestly curses ring,  
Not in the venal court, the servile camp,  
Not where the slaves of a voluptuous king  
Would fain o'erwhelm, in flattery's poison  
    clamp,  
Truth's vestal torch and love's promethean  
    lamp;  
Not where the tools of tyrants bite the ground  
'Mid broken swords and steeds' ensanguined  
    tramp,  
To add one gem to those that now surround  
Some pampered baby's brow, may trace of  
    him be found.

The absence or powerlessness of the good genius is equally proclaimed "whenever guiltless victims fall, Wherever priest the sword of strife



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displays ; ” and this argument is pursued in a note pointing the significance of the lines, in a manner full of suggestiveness for the study of Peacock’s development. The passage runs : “ It is possible to sacrifice victims—human victims—without cutting their throats or shedding a drop of their blood ; and that, too, under the name and with the specious form of justice. It is possible to display the sword of strife and be a very effective member of the church militant without the visible employment of temporal weapons. If a man can be robbed of his liberty and his property for the calm exposition of his opinions on speculative subjects, it is of little consequence whether the instrument of oppression be a Grand Inquisition or an Attorney General.”

Dr. Young has suggested \* that these lines and the note appended to them refer directly to Shelley ; but there are difficulties in the way of this application, independent of the assumption of as late a date as 1817 for the composition of the fragment. In the first place to describe Shelley as “ deprived of his liberty and his property ” because he was denied the custody of his children would be a weak exaggeration, unworthy and uncharacteristic of Peacock : the idea, too, that children are the chattels of

\* In an article in the *Modern Language Quarterly*.

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their parents would be utterly hateful to Shelley and all his sympathisers. Moreover the chancery petition was not decided against Shelley on the ground of his opinions on speculative subjects, but on that of his conduct. The former was the common belief, fostered not a little by the prohibition to publish the judgment; but Peacock knew the truth of the matter, and later in life he published the full explanation in his Memoir. The passage probably refers, if to any definite case, to the trial of the bookseller Eaton, who had published a free-thought pamphlet and was convicted of blasphemy. His fine and imprisonment for this cause are correctly described in the words of Peacock's note, and were the subject of Shelley's letter to Lord Ellenborough.

Whether or no Peacock had in mind any of the cases in which Shelley was personally concerned or interested, there can be no doubt as to the person under whose influence the first three stanzas of Canto II. were written. Style and substance alike proclaim it. There is not much evidence to suggest that at any other period of his life Peacock took an intense interest in "guiltless victims." He was more a satirist of the great than a champion of the unfortunate. The sentences were prompted by the emotion of the moment: they were not in his usual vein,

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and were afterwards cancelled. The contagious enthusiasm of Shelley seems to have acted strongly upon him in this instance, as indeed he always made an exception in his judgment wherever Shelley was concerned.

He tells us in his Memoir that his first meeting with Shelley was in 1812, just before the Shelleys went to Tanyrallt. What led to the acquaintance, or who introduced the two who afterwards became such close friends, has not been recorded ; but the meeting was in all probability brought about by Hookham, who in this year sent Shelley a copy of *The Philosophy of Melancholy* and the volume containing the new edition of *The Genius of the Thames and Palmyra*, which drew from him the extraordinary criticism quoted in the third chapter. In the letter to Hookham acknowledging the books he gives high praise to Peacock's intellect, learning and versification, but laments that his powers should be so misapplied. He objects strongly to the apparent identification of well-being with commerce, of the happiness of the British people with the triumphs of the British flag ; and points out, what is in fact the most offensive line in the whole of Peacock's writings, in which George III., whom he rightly calls a "warrior and a tyrant," is styled a "patriot king." These

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accusations (which for precisely opposite reasons Southey was later on to bring against Shelley) probably startled and annoyed Peacock if they reached him. Yet they contained by implication the greatest compliment he had ever received. Shelley thought him capable of better things. The criticism is typical of what Shelley was to do for him by encouraging what was best and most original in his genius, and censuring what was formal and affected. There can be little doubt that when they knew each other better Shelley forced him to see the falseness of his previous unthinking attitude ; and the lines in *Ahrimanes* are a proof that their author was successfully shaken, for the time at least, out of the complacent mood which had seemed to him the proper atmosphere of serious poetry.

The acquaintance, begun in the summer of 1812, was renewed in the first months of the next year, when Peacock tells us that they met a few times. He was again in Wales in the early summer, and on his return accepted Shelley's invitation to stay with him at Bracknell in August or September. It is a remark that has often been made, and yet any one who reads the history of this friendship will be constrained to make it afresh : how ill-assorted a pair they seem, according to our limited means of knowing

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either of them. It must at first have been the natural but not easily definable attraction that brain has for brain, in spite of obvious and deep-rooted opposition of tastes and opinions. The friendship was made possible by the fortunate circumstance that both were men of great capacity of attachment, and it was actively cultivated by a large measure of toleration on either side. It appears from the manner adopted by Shelley in mentioning Peacock in his correspondence, and from the general tone of Peacock's *Memoir of Shelley*, that those differences which might have been expected to result in antipathy formed instead the basis of a mutual and good-natured forbearance, whereby the two men were enabled to be of service one to the other in those matters upon which agreement, and the asking and giving of advice, were possible. Peacock reveals an attitude of humorous tolerance towards Shelley, with his hallucinations, eccentricities and violent enthusiasms: Shelley on the other hand complains of Peacock's lack of enthusiasm and narrowness of outlook, but finds compensation in his equal freedom from pride, superstition or tendency to dogmatise. He speaks of him again as a good scholar and an agreeable companion.

It is typical of the manner in which Peacock's

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life, even during the periods when he was most under observation, has escaped record, that not one of the various people whom he met at this time or subsequently under Shelley's roof has attempted anything like a complete description or appreciation of him. Not to mention the Shelleys, Hunt and Hogg were garrulous writers, and Newton must be reckoned as an author, for in addition to the works to be mentioned shortly he afterwards published a memoir of the early days of Canning. According to Professor Dowden, Peacock made himself disliked by the Boinvilles and the Newtons by laughing at their enthusiasms; Mrs. Newton alludes to him as a "cold scholar," lacking both in taste and feeling. People who knew him well speak chiefly of his kindliness and geniality and of his great learning. Others were arrested by what they considered his peculiarities. A lady who was acquainted with him during his long visit to Wales told Shelley that he lived quite alone in a remote cottage, "associating with nobody and hiding his head like a murderer," and added the damnatory statement, that he was an atheist. The latter is of course not true, and only shows how easy it was to frighten the Welsh by keeping away from chapel; but it is an excellent instance of how superficial observers, judging

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from the least significant indications, will light-heartedly make a dogmatic statement about the most intimate convictions of a man of genius. Some years later a friend writes of his being engaged in trying to construct inextinguishable lanterns, and amusing himself by puffing at them with a pair of bellows. A more detailed account of some of his odd habits is given by an acquaintance whom he visited shortly before going to the Shelleys at Bracknell. His practice of reading with a classical text in one hand and a commentary in the other astonished the country neighbours, who could not understand why he should want to read two books at once. He spent most of his day walking in the neighbourhood, stopping at any piece of water he might come across in his wanderings to sail paper boats. "These long solitary walks, his paper boats, his books, and the fact that he was a poet, made him a sort of mysterious being to the country people, who certainly were somewhat afraid of him."\* His host was evidently able to get at something of what underlay these eccentricities, for he tells us that he was much interested in Peacock's conversation. But unfortunately he does not pursue this part of the subject.

The sailing of paper boats was one unusual

\* *Life and Letters of John Arthur Roebuck*, page 8.

taste which he and Shelley had in common, and was very likely as good a bond of union between them as sympathy in more serious pursuits between men of more conventional habits. Professor Dowden has shown that Peacock was mistaken in thinking that he had initiated Shelley into the sport, for Shelley was already an adept when they met. At Bracknell they had ample opportunities for indulging in it together.

If none of the members of the group collected round Shelley in this summer have recorded their impressions of Peacock, he has given us a vivid account of them as they struck him on first coming among them. The circle was made up of people who agreed in varying degrees with Shelley in his revolutionary principles in politics and religion, and in the theory and practice of vegetarianism, based on considerations of every nature, hygienic, moral and humanitarian. Thus there were a comparatively large number of principles upon which they were all in agreement, and on those main issues conversation would have grown something more than stale. Discussion began where their principles diverged. Each member of the party branched off, as it were, at a different angle and altitude, from the stem of their collective thought, which doubtless



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appeared of far less consequence in their daily life than those ramifications which gave to each one his individuality in contrast with the rest. The fancied importance of these distinctions and the earnestness with which each supported his pet theory was irresistibly comic to an on-looker who did not adopt any of their doctrines in the passionate and proselytising spirit of the disputants; and Peacock relates that both Harriet and himself were sometimes irreverent enough to give way to unseemly laughter. It is easy to see that among this circle the author of *Headlong Hall* could study at his ease from life.

Of all the people who at different times were members of this society Peacock tells us most particularly of Mr. J. F. Newton. He was an extreme vegetarian and even more drink-shy than a teetotaller, and advocated a diet consisting solely of roots, fruits, and distilled water. He had written a tract called "The Return to Nature," a title affording a ready weapon against him and his recommendation of distilled water, a drink almost as far removed from that supplied by nature as brandy or Burton ale. However, it was his belief that all physical suffering and sickness, all moral diseases and perversions, had been brought into existence through the

corrupting use of animal food and strong drink ; and he was convinced that the adoption by all men of the system of life recommended in his book would bring back health, purity, peace and happiness into the world and restore the golden age. This might be called the practical side of his religion : the theosophical or cosmographic basis of the ethical creed was as obscure and far-fetched as this was simple and actual. The Zodiac of Dendera was the mystical symbol : the grouping of its component parts proved, according to his interpretation, the necessity of the vegetable regimen.

Peacock's attention to these extravagances was at first more amused than serious. Yet he was much impressed with Newton and his general theory of degeneration, drawing largely therefrom for the deteriorationists of his early novels. He also took the trouble to master the intricacies of the Zodiac of Dendera as mystically interpreted by his friend. He was attracted to it as a piece of curious learning, but by degrees came to associate it closely with himself ; so that Shelley could write to him, in his long descriptive letter of July 1816, " Do you, who assert the supremacy of Ahriman, imagine him throned among these desolating snows," etc.

The fragment *Ahrimanes* was to have this

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system as its ultimate explanation, not as its subject. On the surface it was to be a tale of adventure, bearing more resemblance to *Rhododaphne* than to any other of Peacock's works. It was to be epic, not astrological, and the signs of the zodiac had certainly nothing to do with the fact that it was projected to fill twelve cantos. The significance of the title may be easily deduced from the prose scheme of the whole work. The story was of a struggle against Fate, and in a sense of the evasion of it; and this fate, in the third quarter of the world's history, in which we live, was necessarily an evil power—Ahrimanes.

We have no means of stating precisely Peacock's grounds for abandoning the poem. The fragment itself affords no clue. It is in a highly finished state, and there is nothing to suggest that he was dissatisfied with what was written. On the contrary, it is quite up to the standard of the best writing in *Rhododaphne*, and shows Peacock in a vein less formal, less conventional and more full of his subject than any previous work on a similar scale. The influence of Shelley is strongly marked in the style, and there are moments of genuine inspiration beside which the most readable passages in the *Philosophy of Melancholy* are mere empty babbling. In our uncertainty as to its date we

might imagine that it was his last attempt at a sustained poem, and that it was either laid aside when the appointment in the East India House made him turn his energies into another channel, or cut short by the mood that produced *The Four Ages of Poetry*. But just as internal evidence points to a date later than 1812 for its composition, so similar considerations make it difficult to place it later than *Rhododaphne*, written in the winter of 1817-18. From a comparison of what we know of Peacock's reading with his productions, it may be stated as a general rule that his writing followed pretty closely on his studies. This affords an *a priori* argument for assigning this poem to the period between the autumn of 1813 and the end of 1814; for it would not have been in consonance with his usual practice to take the trouble necessary to acquire material for a long poem in 1813, leave it idle for six years, and then, after publishing *Rhododaphne*, return to the zodiac and the powers of good and evil for a subject. The only publications of the date here suggested were the curious ballads, *Sir Hornbook* and *Sir Proteus*, neither of which could have occupied him very long; while during the years 1815-18 as much time as it was ever his custom to devote to literature can be accounted for by five

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published and three or four unfinished works. Moreover the favourite quotation of Mr. Toobad in *Nightmare Abbey*, "The Devil is come among you," &c., is adopted as the motto for *Ahrimanes*. This must surely have been before Peacock had made satirical use of it in his novel. The *Lines to a Favourite Laurel*, written in 1814, mention this somewhat obscure deity as casually and unexplainedly as one might name Puck or Jupiter, suggesting that Peacock was thinking habitually of the subject just then. They mark in all probability the actual date of composition. Their occasion is evidently the author's return, after a considerable time, to the neighbourhood of Ankerwyke Cottage. The absence in question may well be his journey to the north with the Shelleys.

The poem was probably given up owing to an obvious weakness in the genius of the author. *Rhododaphne* is also a tale of enchantment and adventure; but it is easy to see why he was able to carry on that poem to a conclusion, while the earlier narrative had proved too much for his strength. The finished work is a story of early Greek times. Its whole background, religious, historical, geographical and literary, was perfectly familiar to him, and throughout his life an object of passionate attachment.

For its imagery, descriptions and sentiments he had but to draw upon his favourite reading and daily thoughts. For the kind of narrative he had undertaken, for the poetical achievement lying within his reach, the scene might as well be laid in Attica or Thessaly as in the valley of the Thames. All the details of the setting he could fill in with ease and delight, and make his verse musically reminiscent of the artistic traditions, the poetical and historic associations immediately evoked to his memory by the place-names. The material was ready to hand ; the tale had simply to localise itself to be invested at once, in his mind, with vitality. The scheme of *Ahrimanes* made a much greater demand on his inventive powers. The legendary and religious atmosphere was but known to him as a bare theory ; historic and artistic associations were lacking ; the kind of life to be depicted was problematic, except that in its more violent scenes certain features of Oriental conditions were to be prominent. In short, everything had to be created. To make a success of a narrative poem on the subject he had set himself would have required a strength and range of imagination, far in excess of the faculty with which he was endowed. The influence that stimulated him to write the poem imparted also

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the quickening of emotion and sentiment revealed in this fragment, apparently so happily begun. But the impulse alone could not supply a basic defect. It would have taken the genius of a Shelley to produce a great work out of the material, and a greater poet than Peacock to make a readable story with sustained interest.

By this time Peacock had written a few inconsiderable works which are yet biographically important as constituting the beginning of his satire and containing, though in an undeveloped state, nearly all its elements. These are his two farces, *The Dilettanti* and *The Three Doctors*, and the satirical ballad, *Sir Proteus*. The latter was published about the middle of 1814. The rough copy of *The Three Doctors* was written on the blank pages of an old account book belonging to his father, marked on the cover "Day Book: 1768: Saml. Peacock." One of the sheets, containing only two lines of composition, bears witness to an attack of indolence or distraction, or a cessation of the creative impulse. It is scrawled over with detached words, capital letters, curves and meaningless strokes of the pen. In this mood the paper was turned round, with the left margin

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downwards, and in the corner was inscribed :

T. L. Peacock—1811

1768

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43

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It is to be hoped that this historical exercise, slowly and carefully penned, and containing perhaps the second best autograph to be found in the manuscripts, fully satisfied him as to the number of years the book had lain idle, and facilitated a renewed concentration upon the work in hand. To us it is welcome evidence that *The Three Doctors* was written in 1811. The style and construction of *The Dilettanti* point to its having been composed before this date, though later than *The Circle of Loda*. Both plays are intimately connected with *Headlong Hall*, containing characters, situations, and even speeches found afterwards in the novel. It will be enough to mention Metaphor the poet, Chromatic the musician, Shadow the painter, Milestone the landscape gardener, and Shenkin, the servant with a Welsh accent. The earlier play shows little power of construction. The plot is a mere whirl of changing situations and misunderstandings, brought about by the facetious tricks of an abominable stage Irishman.



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He comes into the house unknown and uninvited, locks people in closets, destroys the pictures, throws the furniture about, beats the servants, disseminates lies and scandal, plans an abduction and—receives a free pardon. In addition to this unreasonable use of the methods of farce and even of pantomime, other primitive devices, soliloquy, overhearing, and the presence of an unnoticed actor on the stage, are extensively made use of for the development of the plot. The amateurs who compose the house party are thrown together, to discuss, compliment each other and quarrel, in much the same way as the characters in the novels, though the shortness of the scenes makes their conversation bare and fragmentary and gives no scope for the development of Peacock's characteristic humour. The lyrics scattered throughout the play are undistinguished. A comparative interest attaches to one of the characters, affording the first instance of the author's practice of introducing actual people into his books. Metaphor, with his didactic poem on the Principles of Astonishment, is intended for Payne Knight, author of *The Landscape*, a didactic poem on the principles of Landscape Gardening. This gentleman is referred to in a letter to Hookham of February 10th, 1809. Peacock says he particu-

larly wishes to know whether Miss Cornelia Knight, author of the *Description of Latium*, is his sister. This looks very much as if he had intended to add another character to the play in the person of Miss Metaphor. The Knights, however, were not related, and nothing came of his intention. If this theory be accepted, we have the exact date of the composition of *The Dilettanti*.

The second play is still more ludicrously short, being only half the length of the first. But it is much nearer to *Headlong Hall* and the rollicking fun of the early novels. In comparison with the two earlier plays it marks a decline in form and an advance in style, a sure sign of progression at this stage of Peacock's development. The snap and sparkle of the phrases, the tripping lyrics, the quaint oaths, the Welsh accent, the bustle and confusion, the accidents, the violence, the quarrels, provide an atmosphere in which the reader of Peacock's novels feels for the first time at home. *The Dilettanti* showed us some of the characters who were afterwards to be guests at Headlong Hall: *The Three Doctors* introduces the house and grounds and the genial host. Mr. Hippy is simply Squire Headlong with the additional touch of hypochondriac malady suggested by his name, pro-

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phetic of the Mr. Hippy of *Melincourt*. He has succeeded unexpectedly to the property, which he finds in a state of the utmost disorder and neglect. He is urging his servants to their task of getting the house in order for the reception of four healers and restorers, on whose help he relies to enable him to set things to rights. Narcotic is to cure his own illness, Windgall to doctor the horses, Barbet to attend the dogs, and Milestone has promised to restore order to the rank and overgrown grounds. Hippy's song in the midst of the confusion :

Couldn't that old sot, Sir Peter,

Keep his house a little neater ?

is a distinct acquisition to the stock of humorous poems, and should alone earn for Dr. Young, who published the plays, the gratitude of the lovers of Peacock.

The second edition of *The Landscape* had drawn Peacock's attention, especially through its footnotes, to Humphrey Repton, a popular and famous designer of estates. He is here accordingly introduced as Marmaduke Milestone, Esq., who has "published many books ; sold none." This practitioner and all his works, the "thin, meagre genius of the bare and bald," were the pet aversion of Payne Knight, who held in especial horror the "pagodas and

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Chinese bridges, gravel-walks, and shrubberies,  
bowling-greens, canals and clumps of larch,"

the formal lump

Which the improver plants and calls a *clump*,  
wherewith Mr. Milestone proposes to decorate  
the grounds of Venison Hall. His speech,  
"One age, sir, has drawn to light the treasures  
of ancient learning," repeated in *Headlong Hall*,  
is a parody of Repton's pompous style and  
pretentious assertions. His Plan for Lord  
Littlebrain's Park is Repton's published Plan  
for Tatton Park.

Landscape gardening then is the first object  
of Peacock's satire. His intense love of wild  
natural scenery caused him to think lightly of  
the art of the improver of nature, and perhaps  
blinded him to its possibilities. Yet it is but  
one mode of that formalism to which, at the time  
he wrote the plays, he was still attached in  
literature. It found perhaps its last outlet in  
this application to the crust of the earth: it  
came so late in time that its true character was  
not perceived, and it was regarded as a fad of  
the new school. Even Wordsworth interested  
himself in it, thus loudly proclaiming the  
insufficiency of "nature" to minister to the  
aesthetic wants of man. Formality in wit had  
been perfected in the age of Pope; it was

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developed in another direction by Sheridan, and is to be found in a still different guise scattered in patches over the prose works of Peacock. Landscape gardening, rightly called by some of its professors the manufacturing of landscapes, is formality in nature.

Both in theory and practice this art afforded plenty of scope for quarrelling among the professors, and Milestone, who has in the play a rival in love, is in the novel confronted with a hostile critic, Sir Patrick O'Prism—that is to say, Sir Uvedale Price. Milestone's methods were old-fashioned. His pagodas and bridges, canals, giants and bowling greens, are remnants of oriental gardening. His aims are more anti-natural, and consequently less pretentious, than those of the school which succeeded him. The new men could dispense with much of his extraneous ornamentation: they attempted, not to supply an alternative to nature, but to coerce her and make her submit to form.

Better known as a writer than as a painter, Price is yet appropriately introduced in the latter capacity, since his particular attack on the modish gardeners and designers of the day was based on the contention that their works violated the laws of art. He not only pleaded in favour of the picturesque beauty of natural

scenery, but endeavoured to show that the landscape makers acted on principles opposed to those of all the best landscape painters. A good-natured controversy was carried on between him and Repton on this point. Equally academic but more acrimonious was his dispute with Payne Knight concerning the distinction between the Picturesque and the Beautiful. Knight asserted their identity, treating Price's theory with scant courtesy. Jeffrey in an article in the *Edinburgh Review* attempted to sum up and say the last word on the subject. Commenting on the theory that beauty is inherent in perceptions of smoothness and repose, and picturesqueness in those of roughness and excitement, he adds that there is a third source of pleasure, "a refined degree of novelty . . . for which we shall venture to coin the name of *unexpectedness*." As Mr. Gall he makes this profound statement when walking round the grounds of Headlong Hall. Peacock cared so little for the controversy itself that he actually misstates Price's case: he was only anxious to work in a hit at Jeffrey, and so asks him how he would define this quality "when a person walks round the grounds for the second time?" It is not likely that Jeffrey would have been posed by this question; but he was not put into the book

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to make sport for himself, but for others, and is left biting his lip and vowing journalistic vengeance.

There remain to be noticed two curious works in ballad form, one as simple and plain as the other is overloaded and obscure. *Sir Hornbook*, called in the sub-title a Grammatico-allegorical Ballad, was composed for children. It describes the progress of Childe Launcelot, guided by Sir Hornbook, and supported by twenty-six men—"The first that came was mighty A, The last was little z,"—under Corporal Syllable and Captain Word, along the road to knowledge. Their encounter with the Parts of Speech is felicitously narrated in excellent ballad style. Sir Hornbook helps the Childe to conquer Sir Syntax, who offers the stoutest resistance of all. Having passed him,

They reached the tree where Prosody  
Was singing in the shade :  
Great joy Childe Launcelot had, to see  
And hear that lovely maid.

Last of all they find the Muses' gates, guarded  
by Etymology,

Who ever dug in deepest ground  
For old and mouldy roots.

Sir Hornbook took Childe Launcelot's hand,  
And tears at parting fell :

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“ Sir Childe,” he said, “ with all my band  
I bid you here farewell.

“ Then wander through these sacred bowers,  
Unfearing and alone :  
All shrubs are here, and fruits, and flowers,  
To happiest climates known.”

Once more his horn Sir Hornbook blew,  
A parting signal shrill :  
His merry men all, so stout and true,  
Went marching down the hill.

This little piece alone would prove that Peacock could write a ballad. Three years later he published *The Round Table*,\* another poem for children, introducing all the Kings of England, with appropriate historical allusions. Though not without merit, it will not bear a moment's comparison with the earlier work.

The other work of 1814 was *Sir Proteus*.

In his unfinished *Essay on Fashionable Literature* Peacock justly remarks that “ a critic is bound to study for an author's meaning, and not to make his own stupidity another's reproach.” This has been the guiding principle in a patient study of *Sir Proteus*, but has not availed to modify the conclusion that it is the most obscure of Peacock's satires, as it is

\* The date is given as 1819 in the collected edition but the book is acknowledged in the *Edinburgh Review* for Nov., 1817.



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certainly the bitterest. It has been described as an attack on Byron ; but Johnny Raw, the villain (for it has no hero), is not Byron, who indeed plays no part in it, but Southey. The mistake perhaps arose from its being dedicated to Byron, in a preface lacking even the small remnant of modesty to which satire generally clings. He is ironically eulogised for "the profound judgment with which his opinions are conceived, the calm deliberation with which they are promulgated, the Protean consistency with which they are maintained, and the total absence of all undue bias on their formation, from private partiality or personal resentment," and for all the literary qualities in which Peacock thought him especially poor. The poem extends to nearly ninety stanzas, many of them containing separate allusions to writers or politicians of the time. The footnotes occupy as much space as the text: they occasionally draw aside the veil spread by the verse over the author's meaning, but more often they amplify without explaining. They make better reading than the text, and are good examples of compressed irony. Regarded as a ballad, *Sir Proteus* is so lacking in form and coherence as not to reveal at first sight the general drift of the satire, and when this is discovered it oftentimes turns out to be of re-

markably small account. At the time of publication a reader well versed in current literature and politics would understand and relish most of the veiled allusions. Many men, who then pipped very proudly and are now forgotten, are celebrated in this poem, which is yet not important enough to drag them from their well-merited oblivion. The attitude is that of the worst criticism of the day, identifying literature with politics and confounding both with prejudice and opportunism. Yet though the attack is mainly directed against the Tory faction, the author gives more than one fierce jab in other directions, so that neither Whigs nor Radicals could have claimed him as an ally. Those whom it assails are savagely trounced. It holds much the same place in literature as the *Epics of the Town* in morals. But Lady Anne Hamilton's charges against her contemporaries are more gross, and her satire is below the level of *Sir Proteus*.

Yet in spite of all these drawbacks Peacock did not succeed in completely hiding his wit. The prose and verse of this work enshrine some characteristic jokes, some indignant outbursts and amusing generalisms, in addition to much true criticism and pungent sarcasm; and the reader who takes the trouble to turn over the

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pages of this remarkable ballad will not complain that his time has been wasted. Moreover we must study *Sir Proteus* if we are to understand the satire of the early novels, especially *Melincourt*. Obscure in itself, it contains the seeds of light, and glimmers in the unilluminated passages of other works. Among the many men of genius, celebrity, mediocrity or infamy delineated in this politico-critical tirade, we may here distinguish some who are to appear again in the novels.

Peacock abused contemporary poets generally, the Lake school particularly, and Southey in especial, for eighteen years. Byron has often been anathematised for the same offence, perpetrated with equal bitterness though prosecuted with less single-minded assiduity. Nothing is easier at the present time than to point out the one-sided, short-sighted, ill-natured manner of such an indiscriminating attack. It is only fair to consider, in extenuation of the crime, that it must at least have appeared strange at the time to observe the quondam revolutionaries, Pantisocrats, political prisoners—Wordsworth, Southey, Coleridge, Montgomery, Campbell—metamorphosed into steady supporters of things as they were, and most of them in receipt of pensions or salaries from the Government. Not

only Byron, Moore and Hunt, but Shelley, who had tried hard to like and admire Southey, fully shared Peacock's views as to the political conduct of these poets, as may be seen from his letters of the winter 1811-12: again in 1818 he wrote to Peacock urging him to give the enemy no quarter, "remember, it is a sacred war." The abuse of the theory and practice of the Lake poets as childish, unpoetical and witless was a commonplace of contemporary criticism. It may be seen fully and carefully set forth in an anonymous satirical poem called *The Simpliciad*, a title which will satisfy the incurious.

In *Sir Proteus* Peacock proceeds (according to the avaricious method of his favourite Nonnus, "whom no poetical image escaped," and like his closest English affinity who, in *Jonathan Wild*, for instance, never neglected an opportunity for irony) to make not a selection but an accumulation of charges against his *bêtes noires*, availing himself to the full of every detail that could be used to make them appear ridiculous or insincere.

The Peacockian Southey is well known. It is hardly necessary to remind the reader of Roderick Sackbut, Esquire, who reviews his own poems in the *Quarterly* (*Nightmare Abbey*); Mr. Feathernest, who once saw darkly through

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a glass of water, but now sees clearly through a glass of wine (*Melincourt*); Mr. Rumblesack Shantsee, a turncoat whose company has brought Coleridge into bad repute (*Crotchet Castle*); and Harpiton—"Harp-it-on, a corruption of ἐρπετόν a creeping thing," a phrase containing perhaps more compact virulence than any other writer could put into so many words—the minstrel in *Maid Marian*.

In the notes to *Thalaba* there is inserted a fragment of a country song entitled *Old Poulter's Mare*. Peacock accordingly represents Johnny Raw, mounted on this beast, the Pegasa of the Cumberland school of poetry, boasting of his early epics: Ille ego qui quondam, &c. He has conquered Hindostan, supplanted the Classics, and set Mother Bunch in the place of Homer and Virgil: he has "piped a dismal tale" of Joan of Arc. The next stanza seems to refer to an otherwise uncorroborated incident related forty years later by Jefferson Hogg:

A wild and wondrous stave I sung,  
To make my hearers weep:  
But when I looked, and held my tongue,  
I found them fast asleep!

The story is that when Shelley visited Southey at Keswick, the elder poet treated the younger to a reading from one of his unfinished epics.

They were alone in the room, and after some time, hearing no applause, comment or any sign of interest, Southey stopped reading and looked up from his manuscript; but Shelley had vanished. He had "glided noiselessly from his chair to the floor . . . and lay buried in profound sleep under the table." The weariness and oppression of Shelley while he listened, and the sweet release afforded by his slumber, are pointedly suggested by the quotation in the note. After this rebuff (the ballad continues), to revenge himself on an unappreciative generation, Southey "conjured up, to make them roar, Stout Taffy and his leek," or *Madoc in Wales*. Wearied with these efforts and in need of fresh inspiration, he calls upon Proteus, bidding him appear in every shape most out of keeping with taste and nature. Sir Proteus, "that wight of ancient fun," answers to the summons, assuming in turn the form of all Peacock's pet aversions.

The first vision is of a political economist, probably Bentham, since it is said that Conscience is left out of his reckonings. The second is a famous character of the day, Sir William Curtis, renowned for his gluttony and bad education. He had been Lord Mayor and M.P. for London, had been made a baronet for steady voting in 1802, and was the recognised

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head of the Tory party in the City. A contemporary poem describes a visit to his house :

The jolly knight at turtle sat,  
Regaling o'er some fine green fat :  
Ah, Knight, renowned for calipee,  
But more for spelling King with C !

Here therefore he is introduced " With forced-meat balls instead of eyes, And for a nose, a snout," and described in the note as " a learned man, who *does not want instruction* ; an independent man, who *always votes according to his conscience*, which has a singular habit of finding the minister invariably right ; a free man, who *always takes the liberty* to do that which is most profitable to himself ; a man, in short, of the first magnitude, who *don't care nothing for nobody* whom he cannot turn a penny by." He appears as Sir Gregory Greenmould in *Melincourt*. The " patriot braw " of the next verse is evidently the same person as the MacLaurel of *Headlong Hall*, by whom Campbell is possibly intended. The collegiate figure, in whom Johnny could distinguish " no head between the gown and cap " looks like the Learned Friend ; but at this date it can hardly be taken to mean Brougham, to whom Peacock must have felt friendly on account of his defence of Eaton and of the brothers Hunt. Perhaps

it is a sketch of Canning, who was generally known to have distinguished himself at Eton and Oxford, and who figures as Mr. Anyside Antijack in *Melincourt*. After one or two of less note comes Jeffrey, whom we have already met. There next appear three men in a tub, Wordsworth's household article, "like one of those Which women use to wash their clothes." These men embark not, like the men of Gotham, "to fish for the moon, but to write nonsense about her." They are Coleridge, Wordsworth and Wilson, the latter now forgotten as a poet and almost unrecognisable in this illustrious company, of which his *Isle of Palms* seemed to Peacock to render him worthy. As to the greater persons of this strangely unequal trinity, one is well known as Mr. Mystic, Mr. Flosky and Mr. Skionar successively, while the other is mentioned as Mr. Wilful Wontsee, and, in the person of Mr. Paperstamp, is perhaps Peacock's second villain, unless this place must be conceded to the Learned Friend. Then Bloomfield comes along, introduced by Capel Lofft, and then Moore, with a reference to his duel with Jeffrey. This is of course an excellent occasion for a note on Reviews, which are treated to such universal and particular obloquy that it is no wonder that *Sir Proteus* was unnoticed by the Press. "Monk"



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Lewis may be singled out from a string of even less important persons occurring at this point, since he may possibly be the Mr. Derrydown of *Melincourt*. The last form assumed by Proteus, the most remote of all from taste and nature, is that of a Minstrel of the Scottish Border. Any ear but that of Johnny Raw would have been too delicate to survive the screech of Walter Scott. It startled Pegasa, who reared up and threw Johnny into the sea. At the depth of ten thousand fathoms he finds himself "beneath the ocean's root," a little known locality described in his own poem of *Thalaba*. But he has not escaped Proteus, who retains the form of the minstrel to the end of the piece. Madened by the "ruthless fiddlestick," he cannot get his thoughts clear, yet composes a speech in rhyme longer than *Chevy Chase*—*The Curse of Kehama*. He and the minstrel remain trying to shout each other down. The latter at last frightens him, and he escapes on a dolphin's back. The dolphin carries him to "a wild and lonely shore, Beneath the waning moon," the end of the world. A voice addresses him :

In vain my power you brave ;  
For here must end your earthly course,  
And here Oblivion's cave.

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Far, far within its deep recess  
Descends the winding road,  
By which forgotten minstrels pass  
To Pluto's drear abode. . . .

Here to psalm-tunes thy Coleridge sets  
His serio-comic lay :  
Here his grey Pegasus curvets,  
Where none can hear him bray.

Here dreaming Wordsworth wanders lost,  
Since Jove hath cleft his deck :  
Lo ! on these rocks his tub is tost,  
A shattered, shapeless wreck.

Here shall corruption's *laureate wreath*,  
By ancient Dulness twined  
With flowers that courtly influence breathe,  
Thy votive temples bind.

Amid the thick Lethean fen  
The dull dwarf-laurel springs,  
To bind the brows of venal men,  
The tuneful slaves of kings.

Come, then, and join the apostate train  
Of thy poetic stamp,  
That vent for gain the loyal strain,  
'Mid Stygian vapours damp,  
While far below, where Lethe creeps,  
The ghost of Freedom sits, and weeps  
O'er Truth's extinguished lamp.

Such is the first stage of Peacock's elaborate  
attack on the Poet Laureate.

V

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PEACOCK'S life between 1807 and 1811 is rescued from utter obscurity by the preservation of a few letters. A small number of facts of very various importance and interest relative to the years 1813-18 may be gathered together from another source, though they will not supply a continuous narrative. For these scattered bits of information we are indebted to his friendship with Shelley. As incidents in Shelley's life they have a definite importance relatively to other facts: as records of Peacock they are casual and unconnected. We know for instance that he went with the Shelleys in the autumn of 1813 from Bracknell to the Lakes and thence to Edinburgh: that they read Greek together there: that Shelley thought, towards the end of the year, he was infected with elephantiasis, and that Peacock quoted Lucretius to the effect that the disease was known to exist on the banks of the Nile, *neque praeterea usquam*; and that these

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words were "the greatest comfort" to Shelley. The quotation, with its occasion and reception, like a flash of lightning in a dark place, is an isolated but illuminating commentary on the attitudes of the two men in this first year of their friendship.

The early part of 1814 was the period of Shelley's estrangement and separation from Harriet, culminating in his elopement with Mary Godwin in July. Peacock consistently took the part of Harriet, and was chosen by Shelley to look after her money affairs during his absence on the continent. The following winter was that most mysterious time in Shelley's life when he was living in London hiding from his creditors, and often separated for a time from Mary. During these months Peacock's position was most important as agent and confidant; but beyond proving that he was living, with his mother, in Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane, the references to him tell us very little. On first making Mary's acquaintance he took an aversion to her, as was perhaps inevitable in the friend and partisan of Harriet. Mary on her part disliked him with equal cordiality, though she was at some pains to persuade him that "love was a good thing"; by which it is probably meant that she endeavoured to make

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him admit that she had acted rightly in eloping with Shelley. Her dislike lasted apparently for several years ; but in his old age Peacock speaks of the " cordial intimacy " that existed between them after Shelley's death. At that time Mary may well have come to realise that he was one of the few good friends her husband had ever had : the letter she wrote to him in 1822 shows at least that she had got over the " moral disgust " which she had professed to feel for him. It ends : " Adieu, my dear Peacock ; be happy with your wife and child. I hear that the first is deserving of every happiness, and the second a most interesting little creature. I am glad to hear this. Desolate as I am, I cling to the idea that some of my friends at least are not like me. Again, adieu. Your attached friend."

In the early months of their acquaintance Shelley's difficulties dominated other considerations, and however slight the sympathy between them, Peacock and Mary had to co-operate. His chief occupation seems to have been assisting Shelley at business interviews, carrying notes and messages between him and his wife when it was not safe for them to meet, and at less harassed times accompanying the party, which included Clare Clairmont, in the evenings to Primrose Hill or the Serpentine, to sail little

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boats or construct and send off fire balloons. Marian, evidently the Mary Anne mentioned in the Hookham letters, was known to the Shelley party; and from a quaint reference to her in the diaries kept by both ladies at this date it appears that Peacock would have married her if he had been in a position to do so. One evening he called and was told of the "running away scheme" whereby two heiresses, cousins of Shelley, were to be converted and "liberated" from school, and an unsophisticated colony started, somewhere, on the proceeds of their fortune. Peacock was to marry Marian and join the party. He gravely consented to fulfil his allotted part of the undertaking. But his laughter was not always internal. Sometimes he would arrive in the evening and find the overwrought and anxious young people suffering from the continued strain and want of distraction, Clare Clairmont and Shelley quarrelling, Mary moody and depressed. On such occasions he would laugh at them all, restore good temper, and take Shelley out for a visit to the canal or ponds.

Thus was passed some at least of Peacock's time during the winter. By March Shelley's money troubles were ended. In August he was settled at Bishopgate, and Peacock at Marlow.

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From this time until the following summer, when the Shelleys visited Geneva, he was constantly with them. Soon after moving into their new quarters they made an excursion together by boat as far up the Thames as the depth of water would permit. They turned back at a point a little above Inglesham Weir, where the water scarcely covered the hoofs of the cattle standing right across the stream. At the beginning of the trip Shelley was suffering from a disorder which Peacock attributed to his diet of bread, tea, and manufactured lemonade. He boasts that his prescription of "three mutton chops well peppered" immediately restored the sufferer to robust health, and gave him "one week of thorough enjoyment in his life." By this time the two men had become intimates. They were always faithful friends, yet Shelley disagreed passionately with Peacock on many subjects and had a habit of speaking against him. He said on one occasion, "No possible conduct of his would disturb my tranquillity"; and Charles Clairmont, who visited Bishopgate about this time, wrote to his sister that he was much pleased with Peacock, and would have been more so at first if Shelley had not prejudiced him. Clairmont, a willing idler himself, fell in with Peacock's summer mood. The hot weather

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was no time for study ; both men were happiest when out of doors all day, and were glad enough of each other's society in their rambles.

During the winter months Shelley saw few visitors except Peacock and Hogg. In the latter's phrase, this time was " a mere Atticism." The three friends read Greek assiduously, and perhaps managed to agree in their studies. On their long walks, for they were all tireless pedestrians, Hogg found it very hard to be kept waiting in the cold by some shallow pool until the other two had used up any papers they might have about them in the manufacture of little boats, and satisfied their passion for the amusement which he " cordially abominated." Their more intellectual disagreements are commemorated in those of the three philosophers of *Headlong Hall*.

In the previous autumn Shelley had been living in a state of outlawry, fleeing from creditors and in danger of arrest. The condition of Peacock's finances at the time may be guessed when we read that on the day when the Shelleys were destitute of supplies, he had only been able to find money to purchase a few cakes, sufficient not to satisfy their hunger but to mitigate its pangs. In the early part of this year his own affairs suffered a crisis when, less



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fortunate than Shelley, he was arrested for debt. The circumstances have not been made public. We can imagine that it was Shelley who came to his rescue, as he now had an income of £1000. A pension—according to varying accounts of £50 or £100—which he allowed to Peacock for some years, was most likely begun after this misfortune. In his will he left £500 as a bequest to Peacock and £2000 to purchase an annuity for him.

Shelley was much pleased with *Headlong Hall* and with Peacock for having written it. Later in the year he wrote to Hunt, who admired the book, one of the most eulogistic accounts which he ever gave of its author: "He is an amiable man of great learning, considerable taste, an enemy to every shape of tyranny and superstitious imposture." In July he wrote, as to his best friend, asking Peacock to find a home for him and his family when they returned to England: "You are the only man who has sufficient regard for me to take an interest in the fulfilment of this design, and whose tastes conform sufficiently to mine to engage me to confide the execution of it to your discretion. I do not trouble you with apologies for giving you this commission. . . . When you have possessed yourself of all my affairs, I wish you to look out for a home for me and Mary and William. . . .

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Certainly the Forest engages my preference, because of the sylvan nature of the place, and the beasts with which it is filled. But I am not insensible to the beauties of the Thames. . . . Its proximity to the spot you have chosen is an argument with us in favour of the Thames." This and the two following were the years of their greatest intimacy.

Twenty years later, Peacock turned back in memory to this time of his life, and began a story, alas, unfinished, some elements of which were frankly autobiographical. In the first chapter the three young friends are presented, at the end of a long day's walk, leaning over the bridge at Chertsey. "Associations in one of the party had led our young friends to choose it for their headquarters. . . . The Abbey Field which they had crossed on their way from the ferry was the first in which he had gathered cowslips." Standing half-way between the ghost story in the *Recollections of Childhood* and "I played with you 'mid cowslips blowing" of *Gryll Grange*, it is a curiously central fragment, tantalising in its promised interest. But beyond a description of the Abbey and a list of changes suffered by the town in the interval between this remembered time and the date of writing, it contains little definite information.

In all probability Shelley did not recognise his portrait, or rather his philosophical counterpart, in *Headlong Hall*. He had provided important material for the first three novels, but not until the third, where he is represented in a caricature with an absurd likeness to the original, did he claim the relation. Even then it is not certain that he realised what had happened. We are only told, what indeed may be seen from his letters, that he took to himself the name of Scythrop, because he was in the habit of writing in a glass house on the roof at the time that *Nightmare Abbey* was published. Peacock in fact never painted a portrait. His impersonations are vague and misleading in outline, and can generally only be identified by the prominent fads, eccentricities or pet theories of the real persons, attributed in an exaggerated form to their literary counterparts. In *Headlong Hall* he was trying his hand, and was more than usually careful to mask the likeness and render it as difficult as possible to prove that he had drawn his characters from life. With this reservation, the treatment of the three philosophers in the novel will serve as an excellent illustration of his regular method when introducing actual persons in his books.

What little personal description there is of

these gentlemen is put in merely as a blind. Shelley and Hogg, for instance, were about twenty-one at the time : in the novel the former is said to be about thirty and the latter about forty-five. In the stage coach, conversing with Dr. Gaster, the Maentwrog parson, each merely states his case : they express respectively hope, despair and satisfaction. Their talk displays no other peculiarity, nor does it suggest parody or satire. Their personalities, however, begin to declare themselves at the breakfast table. Mr. Escot, on catching sight of a round of beef, immediately enters on an exposition of the philosophy of vegetarianism on the principles of J. F. Newton, of whom an account was given in the last chapter. When man, he says, " began to sacrifice victims on the altar of superstition, to pursue the goat and the deer, and by the pernicious invention of fire to pervert their flesh into food, luxury, disease and premature death were let loose upon the world " ; and adds a particularly Newtonian detail : " From that period the stature of mankind has been in a state of gradual diminution, and I have not the least doubt that it will continue to grow *small by degrees and lamentably less*, until the whole race will vanish imperceptibly from the face of the earth." This last sentence exemplifies in

detail Peacock's intellectual satire. The first clause is a statement of Newton's belief ; the second enshrines a favourite phrase of his ; the third is an exaggeration involving a contradiction of his doctrine : for he held that mankind was to be restored to its pristine vigour and innocence in the Fourth Age of the world.

In answer to this tirade Mr. Foster, while admitting that animal food may retard the perfectibility of the human species, speaks in praise of fire, the element of which Shelley was particularly fond. Still he is not yet identifiable with Shelley, partly no doubt because the latter agreed with Newton to a great extent, while his rôle in the novel is to be diametrically opposed to him. Mr. Jenkinson then proclaims himself omnivorous, demanding only that all food shall be good of its kind. This sentiment is that of Jefferson Hogg ; its mode of expression, that of Peacock. The sentence contains the essence of all the many gossipy passages in his *Life of Shelley* where Hogg talks about the vegetarians. He objected, not to the absence of meat at their usual repasts, but to the quality and cooking of it when supplied to a guest. Among them he found it better to live as a vegetarian and even, having become accustomed to it, observed the rule when alone. But he went

back to a flesh diet whenever it was more convenient, and passed from one to the other without a spiritual qualm or a physical pang.

The next thing to be noted is that Mr. Escot (while confessing himself to be as profoundly ignorant of final causes as the most dogmatic theologian can possibly be) helps himself to a slice of beef. In this detail, though it does not need explanation as a stroke of pure and obvious satire, we may perhaps have the record of a true incident. Whether Newton were the person in question or not, is of minor importance ; but Hogg relates that he once discovered " a high authority, a defender of the faith " of vegetarianism, one of the Shelley circle, eating stuffed veal. The excuse was, that his wife was away and the veal was what he had found it easiest to procure. Another and a surer reason for Mr. Escot's inconsistency undoubtedly is, that he is a composite personality. His jokes, chiefly at the expense of the cleric, soon make us begin to suspect what afterwards appears fairly evident, that Peacock is using this character for expressing his own opinions in conjunction with those of Newton. This again is in conformity with his practice in subsequent books, in some of which he is guilty of similar confusion of substance, while in others he allows himself plurality of

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persons, by expressing himself through the medium of more than one character at a time.

These identifications may seem to rest on a too slender foundation. It will be strengthened when we watch the three philosophers in the society of the other guests at Headlong Hall. Many of these are already known to us : Mr. Milestone (Humphrey Repton), the landscape gardener ; Mr. Cranium (Dr. Gryffyd), the phrenologist ; Cephalis (Jane), his daughter ; Mr. Gall (Jeffrey) and his friend Treacle, the critics ; Mr. MacLaurel (perhaps Campbell) and Mr. Nightshade, the poets. Like Mr. MacLaurel, Campbell was a late revolutionary, a present pension-holder from the Government, and a Scotsman ; but the identification is not certain. From the very slight treatment they receive, Treacle might be almost any critic, and Nightshade almost any poet, except those who were openly hostile to the *Edinburgh Review*, or its especial victims. Wordsworth and Southey have both been suggested for the latter ; but if he be Southey, it is amazing that Peacock has not mentioned his laureateship, and if Wordsworth, his office and salary. The name would suggest that he might be either Coleridge or the same poet as the Mr. Derrydown of *Melincourt*

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who is possibly intended for Lewis, the poet and novelist mentioned in *Sir Proteus* :

Like grizzly monk, on spectral harp  
Deep dole he did betoken.

Mr. Chromatic is merely the musician, without whom Peacock's dinners would be as incomplete as an Anglo-Saxon feast without the official harper. Sir Patric O'Prism we already know as Sir Uvedale Price ; Miss Philomela Poppyseed bears a sufficient resemblance, in name at least, to Mrs. Amelia Opie to suggest the identification, while the relations of Miss Poppyseed with Mr. Gall and his companions is not out of keeping with a note in *Sir Proteus* where Mrs. Opie is said to be treated with too much indulgence by the *Edinburgh Review*. Mr. Panscope is some outcome and champion of the " march of intellect," to which less attention is paid in the earlier than in the later novels.

Among this strangely assembled company the three philosophers have plenteous opportunities for expansion and argument, and Peacock's partiality to Mr. Escot becomes more and more apparent. In their next encounter on the subject of progress and deterioration Escot adduces instances of superiority in the characters of ancient mythology, and Foster answers, that on that ground he cannot meet him fairly. As he



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has hitherto shown himself by no means backward in disputation, this objection is not intelligible until it is paraphrased, and understood to be spoken by Shelley to Peacock, thus: "It is not fair for you, with your immensely superior knowledge of classical literature, to use such an argument to me." Foster then uses Shelley's contention that enlightenment is virtue (compare his Address to the Irish, recommending Sobriety, Regularity and Thought), and Escot answers with Peacock's assertion that the progress of knowledge is not general, and that it is put to contemptible uses by those who have been able to profit by it.

The chapter entitled "The Dinner" shows the author frankly expressing his own opinions through the medium of his favourite character. He is now in his element, enjoying an easy triumph over his imaginary antagonists. His first encounter is with the parson, who appeals to the authority of Moses to prove that primitive man possessed the faculty of speech.

*Peacock*: "Of course, sir, I do not presume to dissent from the very exalted authority of that most enlightened astronomer and profound cosmogenist, who had, moreover, the advantage of being inspired; but when I indulge myself with a ramble in the fields of speculation, and

attempt to deduce what is probable and rational from the sources of analysis, experience, and comparison, I confess I am too often apt to lose sight of the doctrines of that great fount of theological and geological philosophy."

Shelley then discourses on the superiority of a modern intellectual man over the primitive savage, despite whatever physical disadvantages must be allowed in the former : " No philosopher would resign his mental acquisitions for the purchase of any terrestrial good."

*Peacock* : " In other words, no man whatever would resign his individuality. . . . Unluckily for the rest of your argument, the understanding of literary people is for the most part exalted, as you express it, not so much by the love of truth and virtue, as by arrogance and self-sufficiency ; and there is perhaps less disinterestedness, less general benevolence, and more envy, hatred and uncharitableness among them, than among any other description of men." In saying these words his eye rests " very innocently and unintentionally " on Jeffrey.

*Jeffrey* : " You allude, sir, I presume, to my Review."

*Peacock* : " Pardon me, sir. You will be convinced it is impossible I can allude to your Review, when I tell you that I have never read a single page of it."

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The four literary gentlemen speak as might be expected, the chief part being sustained by Campbell, represented as the very type of the half-educated Scotchman, who mercilessly explains the most obvious remark with the complete procedure of elementary logic. In the course of his dull talk he admits that he consented to "haud his din" on the subject of democracy in exchange for a pension granted by Grenville's government. A brief argument on the use of wine leads up to a sensible remark from Jefferson Hogg, who concludes with a classical quotation, received by the learned and literary society in *un morne silence*. Presumptuous education, encyclopædic instruction, speaks next in the person of Panscope, whom Peacock proclaims unintelligible. He answers that Peacock is absurd :

*Peacock* : " I should be sorry, sir, to advance any opinion that you would not think absurd."

*Panscope* : " Death and fury, sir——"

*Peacock* : " Say no more, sir. That apology is quite sufficient."

*Panscope* : " Apology, sir ? "

*Peacock* : " Even so, sir. You have lost your temper, which I consider equivalent to a confession that you have the worst of the argument."

In *The Walk* a subject is touched upon which,

from evidence almost amounting to actual proof, we may safely assert had often been discussed between Shelley and Newton. Escot mentions "that tremendous convulsion which destroyed the perpendicularity of the poles and inundated this globe with that torrent of physical evil, from which the greater torrent of moral evil has issued," etc. Foster answers: "The precession of the equinoxes will gradually ameliorate the physical condition of our planet, till the ecliptic shall again coincide with the equator," etc. Now the disastrous effects of the obliquity of the earth's axis were part of the Newtonian Ahrimanic theory. Shelley had been acquainted with Newton in 1812, and knew his book, making extensive use of it to annotate *Queen Mab*. In the early part of the following year he enquired at the Hookham's library if there were any book proving that the obliquity was becoming yearly less and less. So he was studying the question, in order to meet the deteriorationists on their own ground.

Escot's long disquisitions on the state of society are too obviously the expressions of the author's own mind to need insisting upon.

Shelley was abroad the whole summer. His long letters to Peacock are almost entirely

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descriptive and contain few personal references to his correspondent, with the exception of one or two commissions. In June we find Peacock again occupied with Harriet's affairs, interviewing Sir Timothy Shelley's solicitor on her behalf. Evidently he had not relished the responsibility of taking a house for Shelley in his absence. Perhaps indeed he had not been asked to go so far as that, but only to make enquiries and report on the most suitable places. However this may be, Shelley, soon after landing at Portsmouth in August or September, went to London to look for a dwelling. He spent a fortnight with Peacock at Marlow, and during the latter part of the time Mary was with them. Peacock was now writing *Melincourt*, and she urged him to make it "funny." This fortnight was one of continuous fine weather, and was spent by the two friends in daily expeditions, either walking or boating. The Shelleys then returned to the West of England, having first secured a house at Marlow, where they moved as soon as it was made habitable. In December came Harriet's death, and Shelley and Mary, in accordance with Peacock's advice, were married immediately.

At this time Peacock was deeply impressed with the theories and practice of his friend;

so much so that, without renouncing or attempting to alter his own, he was employed in thinking out as fully as possible how far there was a fundamental agreement between them and Shelley's, and what sort of a moral philosophy could be constructed out of a union of the two sets of principles. His speculations and conclusions are set forth at length, plainly to be seen by readers who look below the surface, in the pages of *Melincourt*. Thus, while he provided the fun for which Mrs. Shelley had asked in the scenes of the election and in that at Mainchance Villa, in some of the symposia, and in the eloquent gestures of the dumb baronet—the original hero of the book—there is little or no fun to be got out of the composite character which trapped too much of the author's attention, the pseudo-hero, Forester, in conversation with his philosophical companion. So entirely was Peacock taken up with the construction and study of this personality that he allotted an enormously disproportionate amount of space and importance to it. His own absorption in it blinded him to the consideration that it could have but a minor interest for his readers. In Forester are presented, perhaps more than in any other character in the novels, the author's serious thoughts. Yet he is hopelessly dull, and could hardly have

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been anything else. Shelley was a good subject for satirical portraiture ; so was Peacock ; but a coupling of the characteristics that made them so would have resulted in an agglomeration of inconsistencies which not even Peacock could have ventured to put forward as a character. Forester is Peacock without his wit and his prejudices, and Shelley without his purely theoretical enthusiasms, over which experience had no power ; and both without their moments of expansive gaiety. His learning is insipid, his morality a foregone conclusion, his love a mere priggish preference. To this extent did Peacock allow the deepest and most vivifying influence of his life to destroy the harmony of his most joyous and incisive book !

For, strange as it may appear after the study of *Headlong Hall*, Peacock now identifies himself with Shelley, not with his opponent. Yet this seeming change of front is not an inconsistency on the part of the author so much as a rectification of an injustice to Shelley's opinions, of which he had been guilty in the former book. Escot maintains that human nature has degenerated *and is incapable of improvement*, the italicised words indicating the exaggeration and perversion of Newton's position. Foster's contention, that human nature is capable of being

made perfect, is only a partial statement of Shelley's views. The reason for the injustice in each case is obviously that for satirical purposes the two men, who in reality agreed in so many things, were required to be utterly opposed in all their views. On the question of the vegetable diet they were at one. Shelley, in his *Vindication of Natural Diet*, founded principally on Newton's pamphlet, says that he believes our depravity and degeneracy are the outcome of the unnatural habit of life adopted by our ancestors. When in his Address to the Irish he says that "the world is going wrong," he explains the statement as meaning that it "is capable of being much improved." He was in fact a deteriorationist-perfectibilian, and it is in this character that Peacock allies himself with him in *Melincourt*.

He is first brought in, very appropriately, in the company of Sir Oran, whose birth and parentage are already known to us. This being is his commentary on humanity at large, logical, faithful and practical, a man, in short, lacking only in man's garrulity and vice.

The first incident of all, consequent upon the drunkenness of the baronet, may indeed be a playful commemoration of one of Shelley's eccentric actions. He is here represented as jumping out of the window in pursuit of a chimaera, even as he



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once jumped out of the window at Marlow to escape from an imaginary presence. When his servant announced the music master who had been engaged to instruct Miss Clairmont, Shelley, having mistaken the name for that of somebody personally objectionable to him, exclaimed: "I would just as soon see the devil!" and thus precipitately disappeared. However, this is dwelt lightly upon, and Forester, on his return to the dining-room, passes immediately to one of the subjects of his eclectic creed, sugar and West Indian slavery. The attitude adopted by Sir Telegraph Paxarett towards his friend; his allusion to their college days, when Forester used to talk about "the diffusion of liberty and the general happiness of mankind"; his mundane good nature and tolerance of his friend's enthusiasm; his remarks, "You have made no allowance for the mixture of good and evil, which I think the fairest statement of the case," and, on the subject of tea without sugar, "I find the difference, in this instance, more trivial than I supposed. In fact, I never thought of it before"; all these bring before us the Hogg-Jenkinson of the previous novel. But, Peacock's mood in this being so much more serious than in the first book, Sir Telegraph is treated with a correspondingly smaller measure of respect. To take

the most obvious instance, he is credited with more of a taste for wine and less for the Classics. A typical passage of dialogue between the serious Shelley and the cynical, questioning Hogg, is that in which Forester gives a detailed account of the early life of Sir Oran. He proceeds: "In this way he lived till he was about seventeen years of age." *Sir Telegraph*: "By his own reckoning?" *Forester*: "By analogical computation." Many of the foregoing speeches, especially the friendly citations of Wordsworth and Coleridge, belong clearly to Shelley. Peacock's contribution to the character of Forester comes to the front towards the end of the discussion on Sir Oran. Before making him a member of Parliament, he says, "I am desirous that he should *finish his education*. I mean to say that I wish, if possible, to put a few words into his mouth." This is Peacock's own jibe; and his dislike of the political cant of the day is responsible for the question, curiously naïve in a work of satirical purport, "But seriously, is not your object an irresistible exposure of the universality and omnipotence of corruption by purchasing for an oran-outang one of those seats, the sale of which is unblushingly acknowledged to be *as notorious as the sun at noonday*? or do you really think him *one of us*?"

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As if sufficient materials of satire were not already collected in this heterogeneous book, the situation is further complicated and made incongruous by the introduction of Malthus, in the person of Mr. Fax. Forester's description of the latter, the whole tenour of his conversation, the quotation from the *Essay on the Principles of Population* in a note to one of his speeches in Chapter XL., all point to this identification. Fax's conversation throughout is based largely on Malthus' second chapter and the early chapters of the Third Book; his remarks on the poor-laws and on early improvident marriages among the poor are almost quoted from the *Essay on Population*. His general hatred of marriage and propagation is of course a wilful exaggeration, but his "veneration" for old maids and bachelors is taken from Malthus' recommendation to "award a greater degree of respect and personal liberty to single women," so as to make them less eager to contract uncongenial, unnecessary and disastrous marriages. As strictly in character is his belief in the efficacy of "the general diffusion of moral and political truth" which, together with the inculcation of the "moral restraint" in marriage, was the only means suggested by Malthus as likely to bring about an amelioration in human conditions. Moreover,

at the time of writing Peacock was interested in the theories of Malthus and, through Shelley, in Godwin, who for some time carried on a controversy with him. In the light of Peacock's hatred of political economy and kindred sciences, his respectful treatment of Mr. Fax is astonishing. It is also, from a literary point of view, regrettable. It is obvious that he was not prepared, even if he were inclined, to refute Malthus. Consequently he admitted him as Forester's chosen companion and disputant, and lengthens out the book with those discussions, which become an artistic indecency and ought to be expurgated. At his first appearance he comes crashing out at once with a doctrine utterly opposed to those of the plural-unity. "It is in vain to declaim about the preponderance of physical and moral evil," says Forester, "and attribute it, with the manichæans, to a mythological principle, or, with some modern philosophers, to the physical constitution of the globe. . . . The cause is the tendency of population to increase beyond the means of subsistence." Here, then, are the components of a witty or angry discussion in the author's happiest vein; but Peacock, for once, is not anxious to amuse: these theories are treated at full length and with a preponderating seriousness, in a sequence of inconclusive dialogues:

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the spirit of *Headlong Hall* is not absent from the book, but it inhabits other parts of it.

The company at Melincourt Castle provides a more characteristic conversational atmosphere. It includes Mr. Hippy, the indispensable host; Anthelia, not Peacock's ideal woman, but the agglomeration of his ideal qualities in woman, and consequently a prig, whose one merit is that she is unconvincing; Mrs. Pinmoney (who develops and emphasises the views of Miss Poppyseed), her daughter, Lord Anophel and his tutor—all typical members of "what is called society," for which the author and hero have not much taste; the Rev. Mr. Portpipe, a cleric somewhat less debased than Dr. Gaster; Mr. Feathernest, the laureate Southey, who has burned his *Odes to Truth and Liberty* and accepted his post in exchange for his conscience; two penniless and unimportant Hibernians, and lastly Mr. Derrydown, the devotee of ballad poetry. At his first coming among them Forester, significantly described as a "bright-eyed, wild-looking young man," declares his origin by his enthusiasm for Italian and Greek studies and for the education of women. A distinctly Shelleyan touch has already been added, in the charitable action performed by him on the way to the Castle, and described as a "work of justice." At dinner

he expresses the view taken by Peacock and Shelley, and indeed by most of the advanced Liberals, of Southey's political change :

*Southey* : " Now that I can get it for a song, I take my pipe of wine a year : and what is the effect ? Not cold phlegmatic lamentations over the sufferings of the poor, but high-flown, jovial, reeling dithyrambics to all the crowned heads in Europe. . . . "

*Forester* : " I am unfortunately one of those, sir, who very much admired your *Odes to Truth and Liberty*, and read your royal lyrics with very different sensations."

*Southey* : " I presume, sir, every man has a right to change his opinions."

*Forester* : " From disinterested conviction undoubtedly ; but when it is obviously from mercenary motives, the apostacy of a public man is a public calamity. . . . "

*Southey* : " You may say what you please, sir. I am accustomed to this language, and quite callous to it, I assure you. . . . "

*Forester* : " Fortunately, sir, for the hopes of mankind, every man does not bring his honour and conscience to market . . . . "

*Southey* : " Perhaps, sir, you are one of those who can afford to have a conscience, and are therefore under no necessity of bringing it to

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market. . . . Poets are verbal musicians, and like other musicians they have a right to sing and play where they can best be paid for their music."

*Forester* : "There could be no objection to that, if they would be content to announce themselves as dealers and chapmen : but the poetical character is too frequently a combination of the most arrogant assumption of freedom and independence in theory, with the most abject and unqualified venality, servility and sycophancy in practice."

*Southey* : "It is as notorious, sir, as the sun at noonday, that theory and practice are never expected to coincide. . . ."

Southey subsequently flies into a rage on being accused of writing anonymous laudatory reviews of his own poems, and asserts that all such articles were composed by his friends, Coleridge and Gifford.

Such passages, and indeed the book at large, afford ample evidence of the growing unity and serious agreement between the two friends. An external fact, showing one of the subjects that interested them both intensely at the time, and upon which their opinions were identical, is the publication of Shelley's *Proposal for putting Reform to the Vote* within a few weeks of that of *Melincourt*. Yet in the account of the election

of Sir Oran for the Borough of Onevote the partnership in the character of Forester is for the time being dissolved, and the author expresses his opinions through a separate medium. This change of method was almost inevitable. In purchasing a seat for his protégé, Forester is guilty of an action directly at variance with his principles and the rest of his practice. What could he have said to the electors? How could he have justified himself to his friends? His position is logically and dramatically untenable; and during the whole of the proceedings he takes a back seat. Peacock does his best to get him out of the way, but in spite of deft management the position of his favourite is undignified. He sacrifices Forester for a free hand, and having paid this price makes the most of his opportunity to heap ridicule on the system of election and parliamentary representation. The narrative with its vigorous irony is insufficient for this purpose. He finds it necessary to provide another outlet for personal expression, and so introduces Mr. Sarcastic, an *ad hoc* creation, whose utterances from the first word to the last are pure irony. This change of tactics is confessed in a passage curiously similar to that, already noticed, where Sir Telegraph and Forester are discussing the morality of Sir Oran's candidature. Sarcastic



announces his intention of addressing the people of the neighbouring city of Novote on the blessings of virtual representation. Forester says, he will perhaps also make a speech, but "with a different view of the subject." Sarcastic replies with the significant remark: "Perhaps our views of the subject are not radically different, and the variety is in the mode of treatment." Some of their subsequent speeches are as plainly by Peacock and Shelley separately as if the speakers were visible and audible:

*Sarcastic*: "I ascertain the practice of those I talk to, and present it to them as from myself, in the shape of theory; the consequence of which is, that I am universally stigmatised as a promulgator of rascally doctrines. . . ."

*Forester*: "Your system is sufficiently amusing, but I much question its utility. The object of moral censure is reformation, and its proper vehicle is plain and fearless sincerity. . . ."

*Sarcastic*: "I tried that in my youth, when I was troubled with the *passion for reforming the world*."

The speech of Sarcastic to the inhabitants of the unfranchised city, on the subjects of virtual representation and taxation, is Peacock's statement of the case for Reform. Earlier in this episode he remarks that all that can be urged by

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reason in support of reform has been repeated for years, by each party when out of office. Sixteen years later Lord John Russell, in the debate on the Reform Bill, made a full and academic statement of the case, developing all the points indicated in this chapter by Peacock. His speech reads like a plain and comprehensive account, to which these scenes in *Melincourt* are the coloured illustrations.

In the conversations immediately following on this incident a trait of the Shelley of actual life is added to the description of Forester. He convinces Mrs. Pinmoney that he is out of his mind by telling her he does not consider his property to be his own, that it is his duty to distribute it as part of the common property of society, and that he is "responsible to the principles of immutable justice" for such distribution. Sir Telegraph tells her that Forester's actions square absolutely with his talk. For the sentiment it is only necessary to compare the "claims of common justice" of which Shelley wrote, accounting for the disposition of part of his income; for the actions, all will remember Shelley's pensioners and beneficiaries among his personal friends, and the poor of Marlow whom he was in the habit of visiting regularly and assisting through the winter. The phrase "I

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am no revolutionary " may sound strangely on the lips of Mr. Forester ; but taken in connection with the election scenes it is strictly applicable both to Shelley and Peacock, neither of whom, for instance, was in favour of the immediate granting of adult suffrage.

Their joint opinions on West Indian slavery and its encouragement by the use of sugar are set forth in the speeches at the anti-saccharine fête ; though here again Mr. Sarcastic is called in to present the case in a cynical form. In reply to Forester's impassioned harangue he addresses the company, pointing out that they in particular, and mankind in general, are too selfish and sensual to allow feelings of justice and humanity to outweigh the pleasant sensations produced by the taste of sugar. Sir Telegraph, obliging and polite, counters by offering himself as the first new member of the anti-saccharine league, recalling the manner in which Hogg had readily adapted himself to the habits of the Shelleys, Newtons, Boinvilles and their circle in the matter of diet. Two new characters, Mr. Vamp (Gifford) and the worthy alderman and baronet, Sir Gregory Greenmould (Sir William Curtis), loudly protest ; the former because by this abstinence a falling off in the revenue will be caused, and the baronet because such a

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practice threatens the ruin of commerce. The fact that many fresh members are added to the league is Peacock's vindication of the method of ridicule, against the assertion that it is either useless or prejudicial to the cause of progress. Byron spoke the same justification when he said, "Ridicule is the only weapon the English climate does not rust."

The chess dance brings several fresh characters on the scene, some of whom are easily identifiable. The first is Wordsworth, whose political change of opinions and position as Distributor of Stamps was regarded by the Radicals in the same light as Southey's change from revolutionary to laureate. The reader has been prepared for the meeting with Wordsworth, not only by the locality of the story but also by the introduction of the two old servants, Harry Fell and Peter Gray, relatives of little Lucy and little Alice. The stylistic criticism implicit in these names and characters is emphasised in the description of their literary godfather: "Mr. Paperstamp, another variety of the same genus [poet], chiefly remarkable for an affected infantile lisp in his speech, and for always wearing waistcoats of a duffel-grey." Miss Celandina Paperstamp would at first sight pass unchallenged: indeed her Christian name might almost lead

to the conclusion that Peacock knew of the literary sympathy and intimacy, almost partnership, existing between Wordsworth and his sister. But the next meeting with Miss Celandina makes it doubtful if he had ever heard of Dorothy. If he had, his information was lamentably little, and he makes the ludicrous mistake of representing her as the poet's daughter. This character therefore is probably imaginary. Mr. Killthe-dead has been generally interpreted as Barrow, secretary to the Admiralty; but two lines in *Sir Proteus* :

Here Cr-k-r fights his battle o'er,

And doubly kills the slain,

point to his identification with Barrow's colleague, John Wilson Croker. He was the author of *The Battle of Talavera and other Poems*, never forgotten by his enemies; he is here therefore described as "a great compounder of narcotics, under the denomination of BATTLES; for he never heard of a deadly field, . . . but immediately seizing his goose-quill and foolscap

He fought the BATTLE o'er again,

And twice he slew the slain."

He and Canning were among the founders of the *Quarterly Review*. Brougham says in his recollections that Croker was more useful to the Tories as a journalist than in Parliament; some-

thing of the sort seems to be suggested here. Killthedeath's first speech is a paraphrase of one by Croaker in *The Good-natured Man*, given in Peacock's note, which ends: "Croaker was a deep politician. 'The engine to play upon the house': mark that!" He is appropriately introduced, in a subsequent chapter, among an exclusively Tory company, including Canning and Gifford.

The farcical chapters, "The Paper Mill" and "Cimmerian Lodge," are the outcome of Peacock's personal prejudices, the latter especially being untinged with Shelley's critical interest in the subject of the satire. Coleridge was one of the few poets of note really in sympathy with Shelley. He told Hogg he regretted very much that Shelley, who went to call on him soon after leaving Oxford, found him absent and was received by Southey instead. "I might have been of some use to him," he said, "and Southey could not; for I should have sympathised with his poetics, metaphysical reveries, etc." And some years later Shelley, in a letter from abroad, asks for literary news, adding that by this he means primarily news of Coleridge. But in *Melincourt* Coleridge is only just recognisable as Mr. Mystic, rowing in dense fog over the Ocean of Deceitful Form to the Island of Pure Intelli-

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gence, talking unintelligible metaphysics, and put to rout by an explosion of his own gas. From this point onward Peacock identifies himself more exclusively with Forester, and Shelley's part in the character is forgotten or neglected. The most noticeable of his remaining conversations with Mr. Fax is that in the short chapter entitled "The Mountains," in which the author justifies his love of solitude. The scene of burlesque and violence, bringing the friends again into the company of Sir Gregory Greenmould and enabling Sir Oran to perform one of those acts of natural justice which are his glory and delight, alone interposes between this talk and their arrival at Mainchance Villa. The scene here described, unlike many of the preceding, is more than an episode. It is an incident second only in importance to that of the election, from which it is separated by too long a stretch of unconnected discussions.

If Headlong Hall resounded to the merriment of Peacock at the expense of the Edinburgh reviewers, among the Tories at Mainchance Villa his laughter is that of a giant. His joy verges on frenzy. In this immortal chapter, perhaps the most purely Aristophanic production of his comic genius, Fax and Forester meet and join issues with the sacred band of obscurantists and

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reactionaries. A fresh character now appears on the scene—Canning. Owing to a curious anticipatory reputation, the shadowy basis of many frustrated hopes, this statesman may be said to have walked into the House of Commons, when little more than a boy, with the stigma of a turn-coat. Never a thorough-going party man, he suffered throughout his career from judgments passed upon him not as an eclectic politician but as a defective partisan. An official Tory, co-founder and mainstay of both the *Anti-Jacobin* and the *Quarterly*, opposed to Parliamentary Reform, yet with reforming tendencies in other directions that shocked and alienated his party, he was regarded by the various sections as a revolutionary, a mountebank or a reactionary scaremonger. In the summer of 1816, when Peacock was writing *Melincourt*, Canning had just come to London after an absence of two years in Portugal and the South of France. He is accordingly introduced as Mr. Anyside Anti-jack, “a very important personage just returned from abroad on the occasion of a letter” from Mr. Coleridge, “denouncing an approaching period of public light,” which had filled Messieurs Wordsworth, Southey, Gifford and Croker with the deepest dismay; “and they were now holding a consultation as to the best means to



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be adopted for totally and finally extinguishing the light of the human understanding."

The guests whom chance has brought to the door of this conclave—and who, it must be remembered, are the social and political reformer, the economist and political moralist, and the natural, undebased man—cannot be introduced until the meeting is over. Meanwhile they are received by Miss Celandina and Mr. Derrydown, who immediately shoots an arrow of literary criticism, barbed with morality, by explaining the "family group" of Mother Goose, Margery Daw, Jack, Jill, and Jack Horner, each with a finger in the Christmas pie, interpreted as the public purse. When the meeting is broken up the guests are brought in and the party sits down to dinner, and to wine, the unmasker of persons.

At this stage, the bottle having been judiciously circulated by Mr. Derrydown, who is anxious to discover the nature of the secret deliberations, the conversation begins, on a basis of quotations from the *Quarterly*, with question and comment from the visitors. In reading this chapter it is difficult to believe that Peacock has not exaggerated and misrepresented the writer in the *Quarterly* as much as he has travestied the characters of Wordsworth and Southey. But

any reader who is curious enough to look up No. XXXI of the *Review* will find on the contrary that he has dealt soberly and faithfully with his material. He has of course selected the choicest morsels from the mass, but he has not misquoted or given them an intention that would be contradicted by their original context. In "The Borough of Onevote" he gives a true picture of the actual contemporary state of things with regard to Parliamentary representation: the simple truth was the most eloquent for the satiric purpose, which is merely sharpened by the character and speeches of those who take the principal part in the election. His procedure in "Mainchance Villa" is analagous. He has taken as many as thirty statements from the official Tory organ, all chosen from one long article against Parliamentary Reform, and ridicules them merely by the farcical presentment of the characters by whom they are uttered. Many of the sentences are literally quoted, the rest are paraphrased and thrown into a more conversational form. One or two extracts from the pages of the *Quarterly*, for comparison with the symposium at Mainchance Villa, will prove the closeness and accuracy of the satire: "Of all men, the smatterer in philosophy is the most intolerable and the most dangerous. . . . He begins by

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unlearning his Creed and his Commandments. . . . His neighbour's wife may be in some danger, and his neighbour's property also, if the distinction between *meum* and *tuum* should be practically inconvenient to the man of free opinions." The editor of the *Examiner* is "a flagitious incendiary. . . . Marat and Hébert followed on the train of Voltaire and Rousseau, and Mr. Examiner Hunt does but blow the trumpet for Mr. Orator Hunt." "We are treading upon gunpowder." "Others there are who have made a direct purchase of their seats, and these may thus far be said to be the most independent men in the House, as the mob-representatives are undoubtedly the least so."

Exactly twenty years before *Melincourt*, Canning and Gifford had ridiculed Southey, in his character of a revolutionary, in the pages of the *Anti-Jacobin*. They are now exhibited on the comic stage together. After speeches by Wordsworth and Southey, each holding forth on the excellence of his own poetry, Canning compliments the two "honest men" who once were among the opponents of his party. Gifford asserts that "every man who talks of moral philosophy is a thief and a rascal, and will never make any scruple of seducing his neighbour's wife, or stealing his neighbour's property."

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*Forester* : " You can prove that assertion, of course ? "

*Gifford* : " Prove it ! The Editor of the *Quarterly* required to prove an assertion ! "

*Canning* : " The Church is in danger ! . . . "

*Forester* : " I am very well aware that the time has been when the voice of reason could be drowned by clamour, . . . but I see with pleasure that those days are gone. The people read and think ; their eyes are opened ; they know that all their grievances arise from the pressure of taxation far beyond their means, from the fictitious circulation of paper-money, and from the corrupt and venal state of popular representation. . . . "

*Southey* : " My friend, Mr. Coleridge, holds that it is a very bad thing for the people to read : so certainly it is. . . . An ignorant man, judging from instinct, judges much better than a man who reads and is consequently misinformed. "

*Gifford* : " Unless he reads the *Quarterly*. "

*Wordsworth* : " Darkness ! Darkness ! Jack the giant-killer's coat of darkness ! That is your only wear. "

Canning says that the people are loyal and willing to be led. Forester asks, Why was a war undertaken, in that case, to avert revolution ? Canning answers that war was preferable to

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Reform, which it succeeded in shelving ; and adds two of the commonest anti-reform arguments of the day, first, that although some of the practices connected with parliamentary representation may be admitted to be wrong, it is false to say that any harm to the legislature arises from them ; and second, that many of the most zealous Reformers owed their seats in the House of Commons to those very conditions which they proposed to abolish. The latter argument was actually used by Canning in the House of Commons.

Croker and the rest having worked themselves into a frenzy of scare about the danger to Church and State, Canning declares that there is a *great blunderbuss that is to blow the nation to atoms*. "Saying these words he produced a pop-gun from his pocket, and shot off a paper pellet " in the ear of Mr. Wordsworth, " which made the latter spring up in sudden fright, to the irremediable perdition of a decanter of Sherris Sack," over which Mr. Southey lamented bitterly. This commemorates a scaremongering exploit of Canning's in the House, the source, according to Peacock and others, of disappointment and chagrin in his party and of unquenchable laughter among his opponents. In a speech on the "daring and extravagant projects " of reform,

he said : " The projects of innovation do not rest with parliaments and governments ; the projectors would, in the end, shear property to the quick. This is no conjecture of mine ; nor is it merely the day-dream of ignorant and illiterate men. The purpose is avowed : it is detailed and reasoned upon, in a pamphlet which I hold in my hand, with no contemptible degree of intelligence and dexterity. . . . Hear, then, the ingenuous Creed of the Patriots of the Soil . . . " The pamphlet, which he had hoped would rouse the House to a sense of national danger, but which only succeeded in amusing or annoying his hearers, was a socialistic tract entitled " Christian Policy the Salvation of the Empire," one of the publications of the Society of Spencean Philanthropists. Sentences such as " Landlords are the only oppressors of the people " provoked, in those days, laughter without resentment.

The incident of the pop-gun is followed by more party statements and abuse of reformers. Fax and Forester interpose logical protests. The five Tories are too far gone in merriment, satisfaction and drink, to heed them. The voices of the guests are drowned by the Quintetto in which each member of the secret council bawls a hymn to himself and his party.

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Is it surprising that in their last conversation, on the way from Mainchance Villa to Alga Castle, Messieurs Fax and Forester are more than usually despondent for the hopes of the world? Before parting, they come to an agreement on one point, namely, that the only path of real utility is "the general diffusion of moral and political truth."

## VI

### SHELLEY IN ITALY

FOR a year after the publication of *Melincourt* the intimacy with Shelley was kept close. Till his final departure from England he remained at Marlow, and he and Peacock continued their walks and river excursions as in the previous summer. Sometimes they would walk the thirty-two miles to London, staying there two nights and walking back on the third day. It was, however, a productive year for both, Shelley writing the *Revolt of Islam*, and Peacock *Rhododaphne* and *Nightmare Abbey*. As before, Hogg was the most frequent addition to the party, but the Hunts and Godwin, to whom Shelley had introduced *Melincourt* and its author, were often included. We read of an excursion to Bisham Wood and by water to Medmenham Abbey made by Peacock, Godwin and Shelley in April; and of Hunt and Peacock inducing the unwilling poet to accompany them to the opera and the theatre during a visit he paid to



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Godwin in London. An indication that Greek studies were still pursued in common is afforded by the fact that in December Shelley wrote to London ordering the *Dionysiaca* of Nonnus.

Some account of Shelley's society at Marlow, carefully circumscribed and non-prejudicial to any parties concerned, is given in the *Memoir*. Other stories of a more unguarded nature were current in the neighbourhood. Miss Mitford heard some of these from a garrulous person, alluded to as Mr. J., who lived at Marlow and claimed to be intimately known to Peacock and Shelley and acquainted with "all the new school." According to him, Leigh Hunt constantly appeared on the scene with requests for assistance, nor would he be denied; for on one occasion, finding Shelley either absent or moneyless, he carried away a cartload of furniture wherewith to raise the wind. A similar errand would bring Godwin down from London: he would hold a knife in his hand, threatening to stab himself if Shelley would not advance him money on his bills. On such occasions, the story went, Shelley would send for Peacock to protect him. These statements cannot now be quantitatively analysed into their components of truth and falsehood: they are only valuable in so far as they throw light upon contemporary

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opinion as to the nature of the friendship between Shelley and Peacock.

During the last days spent by the Shelleys in England, Peacock, with Hogg, Hunt and Horace Smith, was constantly with him at his lodgings in Covent Garden ; and Mary was occupied for some of the time in copying out her husband's review of *Rhododaphne*—a fitting atonement according to poetic justice for the malicious remarks made by her some six months earlier about its author. None of the party could have suspected that they were then to say goodbye to Shelley for ever ; yet farewells are always unpleasant. The pain of this was spared to them. They supped together on his last evening in England, and Shelley, who had been sleeping badly at nights, fell into a deep slumber. The guests crept away without disturbing him, and he left for Dover early in the morning.

After the departure of Shelley and of the society which his living there had attracted to Marlow, Peacock very naturally felt lonely, and contemplated a removal ; but circumstances, which also prevented his visiting his friend in Italy, compelled him to remain where he was. As a result of this restriction, the year 1818 was the most fruitful of his literary life. *Rhododaphne* was finished in March and *Nightmare*

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*Abbey* in July; the *Essay on Fashionable Literature* occupied his spare time in August, and all but the last three chapters of *Maid Marian* were written between October and December.

In *Nightmare Abbey* he wrote of Shelley for the third time, and made of him, what a more superficial or less intimate observer might have seen in him at the first meeting—a hero of comedy. Although Mr. Foster is but a puppet with a theme, and Mr. Forester an artistic failure, and neither character can be said to add anything to his literary achievement, it is no small testimony to the soundness of Peacock's head and heart that he should have made a serious study of Shelley's philosophy and moral character, and partly devoted two books to them, before writing the story of Scythrop, a playful caricature calling attention to his more obviously eccentric habits, making use, for the purposes of the plot, of some of the most striking incidents of his life.

It is a commonplace of Peacockian criticism to point out how "unfair" and "ungenerous" are the portraits contained in *Vamp*, *Feathernest*, and the rest. To represent Southey as a time-server, Wordsworth as a drunkard, Canning as a canting hypocrite and Gifford as a canting fool, was (say the moralists) unpardonable. Yet little or no exception has been taken to the

character of Scythrop, though a similar line of reasoning would condemn Peacock as the basest of traitors and ingrates for painting his best friend, the abstemious and spiritual Shelley who could stand alone against the world, as a drunkard and a moral and physical coward. And the silence of the critics on the second count is a refutation of their charges on the first ; they have mistaken caricature for attempted portraiture. This, as has already been remarked, was never Peacock's aim. Just as Mr. Paperstamp, for instance, is not either the man or the poet Wordsworth, but a selection of those of his views, circumstances and attributes which lent themselves readily to ridicule or censure, so Scythrop is but a grotesque projection of the youthful Shelley in certain attitudes. Owing to the dull tracts in *Melincourt* and the still preponderating Toryism of England, readers have perhaps approached the scene at Mainchance Villa in a grumbling and quarrelsome mood ; but pure comedy is more commonly popular than even the most entertaining political satire, and *Nightmare Abbey* has had the good fortune of being generally well received, both by contemporaries and posterity. An appreciation which should not be overlooked is that of Miss Mitford. That kindly and sympathetic lady

laughed heartily at the book, and not least at the ludicrous presentment of her "poor friend Mr. Coleridge," though she says that he "fares most lamentably." Shelley's acceptance of the character of Scythrop is well known. He was kept informed of the progress of the book while it was being written, and on hearing of its completion sent Peacock the quotation from Ben Jonson, inserted after the motto from Butler chosen by the author.

Shelley is then the hero of *Nightmare Abbey*; yet, repeating his procedure in *Headlong Hall*, Peacock is careful to pack into the first pages of the book a number of facts and descriptive touches, enabling any interested party to contradict the identification of Scythrop with his original. The account of Scythrop's college life, of his festive drinking and dancing in London; the fact of his being the only child of a father of Mr. Glowry's temperament and a calculating, disappointed, misanthropic mother who had died in his infancy; the very fact of his living under his father's roof—all these are thrown out to cover up the trail at the start. But in the first reported scrap of conversation Scythrop distinctly quotes Shelley. His father, to console him in his grief for a lost love, reads him a commentary on Ecclesiastes, dwelling particu-

larly on the text : " One man among a thousand have I found, but a woman amongst all those have I not found " ; and Scythrop answers : " How could he expect it, when the whole thousand were locked up in his seraglio ? His experience is no precedent for a free state of society like that in which we live." This is a paraphrase of what Shelley wrote in his *Vindication of Natural Diet*, of the " venerable debauchee " who, with his thousand concubines, " owned in despair that all was vanity " ; and it is followed by his habitual plea for the better education of women. Shelley's devotion to tales of romantic mystery, and the influence exercised over his imagination by Coleridge, both mentioned in Peacock's *Memoir*, are next sketched in ; and the " running away scheme " of 1814 has its counterpart in Scythrop's intention of founding a perfect republic with the help of a few fellow-eleutherarchs. The treatise which he wrote and published in order " to feel the pulse of the wisdom and genius of the age . . . on the practicability of reviving a confederation of regenerators," is plainly Shelley's early work with the characteristic title : " Proposals for an Association of those Philanthropists who, convinced of the inadequacy of the moral and political state of Ireland to produce benefits, which are never-

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theless attainable, are willing to unite to accomplish its regeneration"; while the extent of its circulation—seven copies—is probably only too truly representative of that of Shelley's pamphlet.

Such distinctive touches are mostly found at the beginning of the book. As the plot thickens Scythrop is required to recede more from Shelley and approach nearer to the character of a mere sentimentalist tormented by two objects of devotion at the same time. In one of the chapters towards the end he speaks the sincere Shelleyan philosophy in his remark, that "ardent spirits cannot but be dissatisfied with things as they are," and in his reprobation of the departure of Byron from his own country, where the task of regeneration is not quite hopeless, to live in a foreign land, where it is impossible. When at the conclusion, having threatened to shoot the butler for not telling a lie, he settles down into a state of misanthropy and drunkenness, he ceases to be even a caricature. He has left behind all semblance of reality and passed into the region of pure mock-heroics.

The description and treatment of Scythrop's three attachments is the most open piece of borrowing from actual life that Peacock ever perpetrated. Miss Emily Girouette, whose marriage to another man had occasioned her lover

much grief, the cure of which, attributed to the "power of philosophy and the exercise of reason," had in reality been performed by "the greatest physician, Time," is Harriet Grove, of whom Shelley wrote in 1811: "She is gone. She is lost to me for ever. She is married—married to a clod of earth. She will become as insensible herself: all those fine capabilities will moulder." Though Peacock became acquainted with Shelley within eighteen months of the writing of that sentence, the subject of it must already have seemed far away, as he had been married nearly a year to the second Harriet. Scythrop is accordingly represented, at the time the story opens, as under the influence of Marionetta O'Carroll. A comparison of the description of this lady with Peacock's own account of Harriet Shelley will not only show that the latter was his model for the sketch of Marionetta, but may prove suggestive in regard to a bye-path of Shelley biography. Here is the portrait of Harriet:

"She had a good figure, light, active, and graceful. Her features were regular and well proportioned. Her hair was light brown, and dressed with taste and simplicity. In her dress she was truly *simplex munditiis*. Her complexion was beautifully transparent; the tint



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of the blush rose shining through the lily. The tone of her voice was pleasant ; her speech the essence of frankness and cordiality ; her spirits always cheerful ; her laugh spontaneous, hearty and joyous. She read agreeably and intelligently. She wrote only letters, but she wrote them well. Her manners were good ; and her whole aspect and demeanour such manifest emanations of pure and truthful nature, that to be once in her company was to know her thoroughly."

That of Marionetta is as follows :

"A very blooming and accomplished young lady . . . she exhibited in her own character all the diversities of an April sky. Her hair was light brown ; her eyes hazel, and sparkling with a mild but fluctuating light ; her features regular ; her lips full, and of equal size ; and her person surpassingly graceful. She was proficient in music. Her conversation was sprightly, but always on subjects light in their nature and limited in their interest, for moral sympathies, in any general sense, had no place in her mind. She had some coquetry, and more caprice, liking and disliking almost in the same moment ; pursuing an object with earnestness while it seemed unattainable, and rejecting it when in her power as not worth the trouble of possession."

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It is immediately obvious that while the physical characteristics in the two sketches are almost identical, the rest of the description is a good deal more flattering in the first than in the second. The first consideration to suggest itself as an explanation of the discrepancy is, that in Marionetta Peacock is drawing a leading character in a comedy and endowing it with the qualities dramatically necessary for the part. Yet when due allowance has been made for this fact, it is impossible to ignore the likeness between Marionetta and Harriet as she appeared to other observers than Peacock, to Jefferson Hogg, for instance. "Blooming and accomplished" is exactly what Hogg thought her, the first adjective being constantly applied to her in his *Life of Shelley*. He was especially impressed with the lighter and more entertaining side of her nature and, consistently complimentary as is his tone whenever he speaks of her, his repeated praise leaves the reader inevitably with the impression that "moral sympathies, in any general sense, had no place in her mind." Having arrived at this stage in his biography it is scarcely necessary to insist that Peacock was intensely partisan in all his likes and dislikes. His championing of Harriet was as unswerving as was his friendship for Shelley : moreover, he

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writes admittedly in the *Memoir* to uphold her reputation against those who, as he says, thought that in order to vindicate Shelley it was necessary to depreciate her. It has already been pointed out that in his satirical writings he introduces many facts and fancies connected with Shelley not mentioned in his *Memoir*. It is therefore quite intelligible that under cover of a fictive description he should have written more ingenuously of Harriet than when giving to the world her avowed portrait.

The account of Stella, with her raven hair and black eyes, is brief, and carefully opposed in both details to the portrait of Mary Shelley, who had grey eyes and extremely fair hair. The resemblance between the two is limited to their mental qualities : Stella succeeds in captivating Scythrop's fancy and partly alienating him from Marionetta by her intellectual congeniality and sympathy with his visionary schemes. The irreverent laughter of Harriet and Marionetta is contrasted with the serious philanthropic enthusiasm of Mary and Stella. But lest there should be any doubt as to the identity of the mysterious lady, she tells us plainly enough whose daughter she is : " I submit not," she says in her first interview with Scythrop, " to be an accomplice to my sex's slavery. I am, like yourself, a lover

of freedom, and I carry my theory into practice," and then quotes from the fourth section of chapter five of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women*: "They alone are subject to blind authority who have no reliance on their own strength."

In spite of her coquetry and vanity Marionetta holds the affections of Scythrop until he suffers the counter-charm of the dark beauty, Stella. Then, as when Shelley met Mary, immediate sympathy, rapidly deepening into irresistible attraction, arose between them, based chiefly on her enthusiastic participation of his hopes and plans for the regeneration of mankind. To an enthusiast with such an object in life Harriet, or Marionetta, could be, in the latter's phrase, "but a poor auxiliary." The time was bound sooner or later to arrive when he should meet with a woman who sympathised with him, and then—inevitable disturbance and disruption. Rightly or wrongly, Peacock was firmly convinced both at the time and throughout his whole life, that there had been no estrangement between Shelley and Harriet at the time when Mary began to divert to herself a share of the poet's affection. Nothing could better state his view of the situation than the account of how Stella, by appealing to Scythrop's intellect and imagina-

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tion, forced "the outworks of the citadel" of his heart, while Marionetta "still held possession of the keep."

The final supersession of the first by the second love was a painful subject to Peacock. He was never reconciled to it, and did not like to dwell upon it. In the novel he does not allow it to happen, but makes Scythrop lose them both as the result of a farcical discovery and recognition scene. For the purposes of his plot, and also no doubt in order to destroy the complete resemblance between the actual situation in 1813 and that in his novel, Peacock makes Stella ignorant of Scythrop's attachment to Marionetta, and she, in corresponding ignorance of the power of Stella, is at a loss to account for the diminishing amount of attention she receives from her lover, for his more prolonged absences, and for his increasingly frequent moods of silent brooding. In despair of extracting an explanation from Scythrop himself, she applies for information to Mr. Flosky.

This gentleman, of course, is Coleridge. He is here treated a good deal less contemptuously than in *Melincourt*; and consequently the satire more often hits the mark and approaches more nearly to criticism. Indeed, if it had not been so much easier and so much more to Peacock's

taste to make fun of Coleridge than to study his metaphysics, his character, in the successive novels, would have shared the general improvement so remarkable in the case of the clerics, much more than is the case. As it is, he is accused in *Nightmare Abbey* of nothing more discreditable than a love of talking nonsense. At an unguarded moment (on the part of the author, who tries to lay the blame on his puppet) he is found trespassing in the domain of common-sense. More than all, he has the honour of expressing the author's own sentiments on the occasion of the arrival of a parcel of modern books. He must have had Peacock's personal sympathy for the treatment accorded to him in the *Quarterly*. By this Review, so strongly supported by Southey, he had been, in his own words, effectively "undermined by utter silence or occasional detractive compliments." Here then he has his revenge. After passing a compendious criticism on a novel by Mrs. Radcliffe and a poem by Byron, he proceeds: "The *Quarterly Review*. Hm. First article—'An Ode to the Red Book,' by Robert Southey, Esquire. Hm. His own poem reviewed by himself. Hm-m-m." Peacock, then, had altered his mind as to the relations between Southey and Coleridge since he accused them, in *Melin-*

*court*, of carrying on a regular log-rolling business in partnership with Gifford. The new position is summed up when Newton, speaking of the advantages our ancestors possessed over us, says : " They saw true men, where we see false knaves : they saw Milton, and we see Mr. Southey " ; and Coleridge answers : " The false knave, sir, is my honest friend ; therefore, I beseech you, let him be countenanced. God forbid but a knave should have some countenance at his friend's request." His conversation with Marionetta is intended mainly to ridicule his philosophical pretensions ; yet the tone is more purely comic than satiric. No one in reading the scene feels that he is a despicable person, or entirely a fool. It is the same with many of the other characters. In this book more than in any other of his early period, Peacock indulges in ridicule without abuse, and satire free from bitterness. A genial touch is added to the portrait of Coleridge in the " treatise which Mr. Flosky *intends* to write, on the Categories of Relation, which comprehend Substance and Accident, Cause and Effect, Action and Reaction," and another in the five hundred lines which he has composed in his sleep.

Of the other characters in *Nightmare Abbey* some are easily recognisable. Mr. Glowry re-

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presents universal and unilluminated pessimism ; but his great friend Mr. Toobad is our old acquaintance, Mr. J. F. Newton. As Mr. Escot he had been in league with Peacock, being allowed the last word in all the discussions. Here he is permitted, like all the other persons, to make a good statement of his case, but, though there is no definite victory, his point of view is efficiently combated by Mr. Hilary's repeated inculcations of cheerfulness and forbearance. His system has already been discussed. It may be added here that a favourite device with him, as with many eccentrics, was to quote passages from the Bible in support of his tenets. Mr. Toobad's "Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea," etc., is a typical instance of the practice. As it had been adopted as the motto for *Ahrimanes* we are tempted to believe that it was an habitual exclamation of Newton's. The Rev. Mr. Larynx, as his name is less damnatory than those of his predecessors, so he is a more decent person and a more genial companion than Messieurs Gaster, Grovelgrub and Portpipe. The Hon. Mr. Listless is all that his name implies, and has been identified with a fashionable dandy of the day.

Mr. Cypress is well known to be a caricature of Byron. He is appropriately introduced as about to leave England : Byron had taken his



final departure amid a storm of glory and execration about two years before the passage was written. His lacerated and disillusioned spirit proclaims him at once. "The mind is restless," he says, "and must persist in seeking, though to find is to be disappointed." He has quarrelled with his wife and written a poem to inform the public of the separation. He has no hope for himself or others. He quotes *Childe Harold*. So careless was Peacock to conceal the identity of this character, or perhaps so careful was he to announce it, that he makes Mr. Flosky say; "Brutus was a senator; so is our dear friend, but the cases are different. Brutus had some hope of political good: Mr. Cypress has none." The term "senator" was applicable to Byron, but not to Mr. Cypress.

Mr. Asterias is an absurd and credulous scientist; an expert at classification and a babe in his incapacity to estimate the value of evidence, who spends his whole life in searching for specimens of marine humanity, "the orang outangs of the sea." He is probably not intended to represent any actual person, but merely as a type of the superstitious specialist. Several of his fellows will be met in *Crotchet Castle*; but compared with them he has the advantage of being more amiable and less harmful, though utterly futile.

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Mr. Hilary has a small part, but usually speaks the author's own opinions. The accent is unmistakable, for instance, when he says that Mr. Flosky's remarks have "not much to do with Dante, but a great deal with the blue devils"; and his statement of the chief rule in the new poetry, "to remember to forget that there are any such things as sunshine and music in the world," is as characteristic as his praise of the "cheerful and solid wisdom of antiquity." His instances of the two modes of pleasure—listening to *Don Giovanni* in a theatre radiant with light and beauty, and boating at sunset on a lonely lake—are significant when it is remembered that *Don Giovanni* was the first opera that Peacock took Shelley to hear, and that boating was one of their favourite pastimes. It is Hilary who is chosen to condemn the Byronic attitude as that of a man who "will love nothing but a sylph, who does not believe in the existence of a sylph, and who yet quarrels with the whole universe for not containing a sylph." We may even notice a minute point, otherwise negligible but helping to identify the character, namely, that Hilary proposes and sings the catch of the *Three Men of Gotham*, a legend for which Peacock had a particular fondness, recurring to it half a dozen times in his writings, from *Sir Proteus* to *Gryll Grange*.

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Had Peacock shadowed Harriet, Shelley and Mary in the Calliroë, Anthemion, Rhododaphne of his poetic romance of that year? It is a question that need not detain us more than a minute. Shelley certainly looms exceedingly large in Peacock's work: the prevailing tendency nowadays is to see him everywhere, under the most complete disguises, and identifiable by the most remote analogy. An easy way to dispose of this view would be to say that its fashionableness is a proof of its error. But not to stray beyond the bounds of particularity, it is sufficient here to register an emphatic protest against its application to the poem in question. It would be tedious to point out the many discrepancies between the plot of *Rhododaphne* and the situation either in 1813 or 1818, and the hopeless insufficiency of the character-traits in the persons of the romance to connect them with their supposed prototypes. One observation will suffice. The general question of constancy in love is put, fairly and squarely, in the opening lines of Canto II. Is love of such a nature that "only one fair form may dwell In dear remembrance," or "does one radiant image . . . make the mind A temple, to receive and bless All forms of kindred loveliness?" If any answer is provided in the working out of the plot, it is, that the

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former proposition is true ; that the authentic image of love can only be supplanted for a time, by means of magic. Let any unprejudiced reader compare this solution with the history of the too much discussed chapter in Shelley's life, with the manner in which he felt and represented the case, and with what Peacock thought and wrote about it ; and he will require no arguments to persuade him to a conclusion.

On the 7th of July, soon after the completion of *Nightmare Abbey*, Peacock and his mother moved into a house in West Street, Marlow. On the day of taking possession he began to make daily notes in a diary. They are the briefest of jottings, and cannot have occupied more than a few minutes of each day ; yet from the last entry, a hurried scrawl relating to September 18th to 26th, it appears that the journal was discontinued because he was too much taken up with other matters to spare time even for this slight interruption of his pursuits. The ten weeks thus recorded are referred to as summer holidays. " Laziness must not continue," is a remark occurring in the third week. Yet his was a strenuous laziness, and rightly called by that name only in as much as his energies were diverted to a number of occupations instead of being

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concentrated upon one. The diary gives an account illustrating and confirming those of his friends as to how his time was generally spent in the summer months, though the proportion of it devoted to serious reading is seen to be greater than was suspected by others. Many of his days were passed partly or wholly on the river, often with his mother, and on other occasions with books, especially Nonnus. There are records of reading and dreaming on the water in the intense heat, of sailing when there was a breeze, of hard pulling against a strong current, of paddling down again by moonlight, to make the less fortunate amateur waterman long to pack up and be off up the Thames valley. The frequenters of the river a hundred years ago, though fewer in number, seem to have been much the same as their modern successors: on August 15th is the entry, "Met a surly old fellow in a punt whom I was obliged to blow up." The time spent out of doors and not on the water was chiefly occupied in gardening, and in walking and reading in Bisham Wood.

There are references to three or four friends, to one or two domestic matters (for instance, "Mr. Steevens of Maidenhead tuned the piano—8s. "), and to letters to and from Shelley, Hogg, Hookham and the "Marianne" whom, with her

name spelt in every possible way, we have heard of before. It is perhaps only a coincidence that this lady is mentioned more than once during the days that were partly spent in reading the ballads of Robin Hood, in view of the already projected *Maid Marian*. A short and vivid account of the genesis of this work may be read in the diary, affording a genuine peep behind the literary scene at the process of desire, thought, inspiration : " *August 4th*. Looked over various books, fishing for a scheme for a romance. *5th*. Went on the river, but occupied the principal part of the day with meditating a scheme for a romance. *6th*. Could not read or write for scheming my romance. Rivers, castles, forests, abbies, monks, maids, kings, thieves and banditti dancing before me like a masked ball."

The greatest biographical value attaching to the diary is owing to the very full information it contains about his reading and writing during the period covered by it. Between July 16th and August 23rd he wrote all that was ever finished of his *Essay on Fashionable Literature*. The entries referring to this work, often by its numbered paragraphs, are so accurate that we can often tell how many words were written in a day. This accuracy also makes it safe to

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presume that he chronicled every odd hour devoted to composition. A rough calculation on this basis shows that he wrote very little in any one day, sometimes only 50 or 100 words and seldom more than 500. The state of the manuscript proves that he worked carefully, scarcely ever turning back to alter or change the sequence of his sentences or to make additions, but progressing steadily from point to point. The Essay, like all his fragments, is extremely characteristic of the author and, having been brought so far towards completion, would be well worth printing. Following so closely on *Nightmare Abbey* it is especially interesting for comparative purposes in its last half. This is entirely taken up with a detailed defence of Coleridge against the attacks on him in the *Edinburgh Review*. As with Mr. Flosky and the *Quarterly*, so here Peacock's ardour is more against the reviewers than for their victim; yet such an open championing of one of the Lake school shows a decided broadening in his sympathies.

In addition to boating, walking, gardening, letter-writing and literary work, Peacock found time in this "summer holiday" for an amount of miscellaneous reading, showing him to have been truly voracious. In the five weeks between the commencement and abandonment of the

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Essay he was reading Pindar, Nonnus, Gifford on the Roman Satirists (a piece of criticism for which he has much praise), Stanley's *History of Philosophy*, Buffon's *Histoire du Cygne*, Masaniello, the *Fisherman of Naples*, Cowper, Burns, Wordsworth, Statius, old English ballads, Burke's *Letter to a Noble Lord*, the *Pamphleteer*, the *Examiner*, the *Novum Organum*, the *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, and an unnamed Natural History. The last entry in the diary is more eloquent than any comment: "Neglected my journal during this period [eight days] being absorbed in Cobbet's *Register*, and his *Year's Residence in America*, Pinchbeck's *Notes on America*, the second series of *Tales of my Landlord*, writing part of a pamphlet on the Probable Result of the Present State of Things, investigating the South Sea Bubble, etc."

The last months of 1818 were spent in writing *Maid Marian*. Letters from Shelley show that Peacock was also engaged in correcting the proofs of *Rosalind and Helen*, and in writing a financial pamphlet, perhaps that mentioned in the last entry of the diary, as well as in the "nympholeptic tale" of *Satyrane*. This was to be a story of the love of a mortal for a nymph and the punishment that befell them both from the gods. Only the first chapter was written out, and it is



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difficult to see how this was to be connected with the main plot. It tells of the wreck of a mission-ship and the floating of the only survivor, by favour of a special Providence and the secondary instrumentality of a cork jacket, to an unknown shore, whereon he lands, armed only with a Bible and a bottle of rum. These undertakings, together with the project of a visit to Shelley in Italy, were suddenly abandoned. He still intended to finish *Satyrane*, but relinquished the design on seeing, in 1821, the announcement of Horace Smith's *Amarynthus the Nympholept*. In the early days of 1819 he received the offer, subject to his passing in a test-paper, of a post in the East India House. He moved immediately up to London to read for the examination. He had six weeks in which to prepare for the ordeal, and at the end of that time received from the examiners a compliment, showing that from the very beginning of his connection with the House his talent and success were conspicuous. Their judgment on his papers was: "Nothing superfluous and nothing wanting."

In this unexpected manner his desultory life, with all its busy idleness and manifold occupations, reached an abrupt ending. From this moment he passes into a state of greater prosperity and, for us, of increasing obscurity. For the next

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twelve years there are half a dozen publications and perhaps as many references by his acquaintance, proving that his old interests had not lapsed. For the thirty years following the appearance of *Crotchet Castle* he can, as it were, be proved to have been living by a scattered series of contributions to periodical literature and a few official documents. At the end of that time he flashes again into view with the publication of his *Memoir of Shelley* in *Fraser's Magazine* and the appearance of *Gryll Grange* as a serial in the same journal. He is now writing for the sons of the men who read *Crotchet Castle*, the grandsons of those to whom *Palmyra* was intended to appeal. Ten years before his last novel was issued George Meredith, his son-in-law, had dedicated to him his first volume of poems.

It is not surprising that the first years of official life, involving so great a change in habits and such a limitation of leisure time, should have witnessed a check upon his literary output. He never again became a fluent writer. The year 1818 was his third of continuous authorship, and its productivity was considerable. Literature was then his business. But from the following until six and thirty years later it could only be prosecuted as a recreation, and his leisure

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was devoted too much, according to the season, to study and to out-of-door pursuits to leave much time for persistent composition. In these circumstances he yielded to the temptation of dissipating his energies among a number of articles in magazines and reviews. During all the rest of his life he produced but one more romance and two contemporary conversation-stories. He grew more and more engrossed in the business of the East India House, not merely in the routine of the office, but in the wider questions of financial and general policy and in their shipbuilding experiments.

Correspondence with Shelley was kept up. We know that Peacock saw *Julian and Maddalo* and *Prometheus Unbound* through the press. In the early part of his life in London he and Hogg were in the habit of spending Sunday with the Hunts, and passing "pleasant afternoons, talking of mythology, the Greeks and our old friends." Hunt adds, that they all made jokes at Peacock's expense, pointing out that he was now become one of the corrupt salaried officials, the old objects of his scorn and hatred. His friends, however, found that prosperity had not spoiled him, and that he was "very pleasant and hospitable."

From Hunt's correspondence with Shelley it may also be gathered that Peacock went to

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the opera every Saturday ; but “ some mathematician ” had got hold of him and demonstrated syllogistically that he ought not to do so : he was therefore reading Greek on those evenings during the hours of performance. The humour of this passage may have been more intelligible to Shelley than it is at the present day. It probably amounts to not much more than a confession that Peacock was too logical and consistent for Hunt’s taste, and was provoked by his journalistic enthusiasms into a mood of stern and unsympathetic reasoning.

A commission from Shelley which cannot have been undertaken with much hope of success was to procure a production of *The Cenci* at Covent Garden. Needless to say, the play was refused. Peacock had previously suggested a treatment of the plot which, had it been adopted, might have made the piece less out of the question from the point of view of the Examiner of Plays ; but his advice had been rejected.

A few of Shelley’s letters of the year 1820 enable us to glean a few facts of very various importance connected with Peacock’s life. The first asks him to make what terms he can with a creditor, who was threatening the utmost rigour of the law against the exiled poet. Another congratulates him on his marriage with the

“amiable mountaineer.” Peacock had given an exceedingly brief, matter-of-fact, businesslike account of this affair, which Shelley says is exactly like the *dénouement* of one of his own novels. Here too occurs the fourth and last reference to “Marianne.” If, says Shelley, Peacock had married her, he would never have seen much of them, but as it is he does not despair of again enjoying his friend’s society.

In November the *Four Ages of Poetry* was published in Ollier’s *Literary Miscellany*. This essay, as is well known, roused Shelley to write the *Defence of Poetry*, which was sent to England the following March. The only two points at which the literary work of Shelley and Peacock came into contact were *Rhododaphne* and the *Four Ages*, the former calling forth Shelley’s eulogistic review and the latter his polemic reply. Owing to the malice of their common literary friends the connection was severed at both points. The review of *Rhododaphne* was never printed and only partly preserved, while the *Defence of Poetry* was so pruned and edited by the Hunts that all references to Peacock’s work were omitted and it appeared as an essay with a merely general appeal—a defence of poetry against attack or neglect on the part of the public, from which it never in fact suffered.

For the remaining years of Shelley's life there is nothing definite to be recorded. Two letters, contradicting each other in the poet's habitual style, may be noticed, the first stating that all his commissions have been "totally neglected" by Peacock, and the second thanking him for his "kind attention" to business affairs. This letter contained *Adonais*, and refers expectantly to the birth of Peacock's first child. The year 1822 was epochal in many ways for Peacock: the summers at Marlow must already have seemed to belong to a period definitely part of the past. Shelley was dead: he was himself married and a father. In that year he received promotion in the service of the Company. He brought his first period of prose writing to a close by finishing and publishing *Maid Marian*: he had already entered on his second by writing his first contribution to periodical literature in the *Four Ages of Poetry*.

His popularity as a writer was much advanced, in the December of this year, by the production of the opera *Maid Marian* at Covent Garden. This was a dramatised version of Peacock's novel by J. R. Planché, with music by Bishop. The value of this production as an advertisement for the original work, such as would have been even more acceptable a few years back, was perceived

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at once by Peacock, who cordially gave his consent to Planché's scheme. Hookham was exceedingly short-sighted in his view of the matter, and not only indignantly refused to publish the libretto but threatened to prosecute the adaptor for infringement of copyright. Experience showed that Peacock was the wiser of the two ; for *Maid Marian*, mentioned on the cover of the libretto, enjoyed a greater popularity than any of his earlier works.

## VII

### THE AUTHOR OF "HEADLONG HALL"

*The Comic Spirit conceives a definite situation for a number of characters, and rejects all accessories in the exclusive pursuit of them and their speech.*

—GEORGE MEREDITH.

"**H** EADLONG HALL" was issued anonymously. On it Peacock determined to rise up or fall down. Whatever he published subsequently was either signed "By the Author of *Headlong Hall*," or, like *Rhododaphne*, anonymous. To some of his periodical and occasional articles fanciful initials were appended. In thus identifying himself with his first novel Peacock acted wisely from every point of view. His name was attached to four undistinguished volumes of verse: what little reputation had been made by these productions would not have materially increased the sale of his novel: the appeal, then, was to be made to a new public. He was, we may safely suppose, convinced by now of the mis-



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taken direction of his early efforts. It was not his intention to make a bid for popularity among the circles of the intellectually torpid and the stylistic reactionaries who had given encouragement to his poetic labours, or laboured poetics, in the past. His new book was to be read by the intelligent and well-informed ; it was addressed to those who were keenly interested in the problems and disputes of the day. If it annoyed as well as it amused them, no harm would be done. It was eminently calculated, not to lull them into the sleep of complacency or acquiescent approval, but to wake them up. The small and factitious reputation his own name had acquired was useless or misleading in the new venture. Anonymity was still largely in vogue ; the public of those days would not look with mistrust on a book, however polemic, satirical or intimate, whereof the authorship was not avowed.

Moreover, whatever may have been the author's main object and principal delight in writing the book, the chief claim of *Headlong Hall* to recognition is its general effect, its total capacity to interest and amuse. It must hold the attention not only of readers sufficiently initiated in the working of contemporary politics and periodical criticism to see the exact force

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of all the sly sallies and veiled allusions, and to recognise prominent characters of the day in their literary disguise. If its merit lay wholly or chiefly in the cleverness and accuracy of its topical and personal elements, it could be appreciated only in a few political and literary clubs and would be valueless as a work of general literature. It must appeal for ultimate success to the wider circle of cultivated readers with a general interest in politics, letters and art, who will find entertainment in the conversations dealing with the tendencies and fashionable whims of the day, in the descriptions and comments and in the personality of the author. By his success or failure in these respects must Peacock be judged. That the final verdict has been favourable is proved by the fact that six editions of the novels have appeared since his death. When it is remembered that his works could never have appealed to the multitude, and that the circle among whom his vogue is possible is, owing to the changing tendencies in "education," becoming yearly smaller, the reprinting of his works to this extent shows that he has had a steady succession of admirers. The study and admiration of Peacock is almost a cult; but of all cults it is the most disinterested and the most exclusively founded on personal taste and

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judgment. It is, moreover, the cult of Peacock the artist, not of Peacock the doctrinaire. The bond between its members is not historical research, nor exclusive love of the classics, nor violent political feeling. A tinge of disillusionment, a little knowledge of life, in the usual acceptation of that phrase, may be a necessary component in the character of the Peacockian ; but his right to the title is based on his pleasure in reading Peacock for the sake of his wit and his style.

*Headlong Hall*, as it marked the author's final stage from bondage to liberty, proclaimed at the same time the appearance of something absolutely new in English literature. It is as fresh and original as his elaborate and formal pieces were outworn and derivative. In style and manner, in the more restricted sense of the words, he still belongs to the eighteenth century, Fielding being his most obvious influence, especially noticeable in his careful and lucid accounts of unheroic events, in the epic style ; while Sheridan perhaps inevitably influenced his arrangement of the witty sayings of his characters, though he owes more to Cicero than to either of them. The stateliness and restraint of his language in description also belongs to a previous age. But any likeness between Peacock's

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style and that of the older authors is the outcome of strong and original sympathy, not of imitation. He belongs, in style and language, to a school, but he borrows from no master. He lived intellectually and, it is not too much to say, emotionally in ancient Greece and Rome and in England of the "classical" period. The style which he inherited and absorbed from the great writers of the past became his own favourite and familiar mode of expression. He made use of it in his books, prefaces, articles, letters to the papers, and in all but the most trivial scrawls among those to his intimate friends. He certainly conversed in it at times ; and there can be little doubt but that it decorates many official communications in the archives of the East India House.

If verbal criticism assigns Peacock to a previous school or period, an examination of the conduct of his stories, if they are to be so called, will show that his method is all his own. It is indeed the most drastic, the most economical of time and trouble that was ever adopted by a reputable author. The recipe is simple : Let there be a country house (described) ; let there be a gathering of numerous guests therein (catalogued) ; let the various opinions of the party be as opposite and irreconcilable as possible (opinions briefly

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but adequately sketched) ; invent a slight plot for form's sake, bring your characters together at the dinner table, and conversation will follow as a matter of course, leading to amusing scenes and revelations. When you have written enough, disperse the guests and add a formal Conclusion. Such is the general scheme of the Peacockian novel. *Headlong Hall* adheres very closely to this type. Some of the others depart from it in varying degrees, but they gain little or nothing by such divergence. In *Crotchet Castle*, for instance, the harmony and cohesion of the work suffer considerably owing to the unusual amount of importance assumed by the plot ; the book consequently challenges a criticism from which it would otherwise have been safe and which can only be destructive. *Melincourt* is a more pronounced instance of divergence from type and consequent diminution of interest and weakening of effect. The true genial atmosphere, with the author at his best, is to be found in *Headlong Hall*, *Nightmare Abbey* and *Gryll Grange*, and in parts only of *Crotchet Castle* and *Melincourt*, where the company gathers round one or at most two hospitable tables, and the conversation, now amicable, now acrid, now uproarious, but always formal and complete, furnishes the main interest.

Peacock was at no pains to conceal his neglect and scorn of the usual methods of the full-sized novel. *Headlong Hall*, typical in this as in all other respects, is deliberately calculated to flout and disgust the habitual reader of fiction in his own or any other age. The stage-coach with the four passengers, who "it appeared, to the surprise of every one, though perfect strangers to each other, were actually bound to the same point," and were to be the guests of the same eccentric individual, is not incredible: but the details immediately added to this remarkable circumstance, sufficient in itself to satisfy as much credulity as is usually demanded by a first chapter, give a series of shocks to the sensibility nurtured in the conventionalities of well-ordered fiction. When it is discovered that the four interlocutors are incapable of agreeing on any point, such a reader feels that the author is trifling with him; the derivation of their names—Escot, ἐς σκότον in tenebras, scilicet, intuens, and the rest—is little less than an insult to the stiff-necked intelligence. The categorical method is pursued in the introduction of the guests on their arrival, each with an appropriate description or a speech in character. But the chapters are short, and the true value of the book soon becomes apparent: if the reader's heart

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has not been won by Mr. Milestone and the "finger of taste," it cannot long hold out against Mr. Escot, with his calm and dispassionate manner in analysing the opinions of his opponents, until they are all given off in vapour, leaving nothing behind. All must follow him with sympathy, in his series of victorious conflicts with his enemies, clerical, literary and scientific; for never was there a hero for whom favour was so openly and yet winningly canvassed by the author.

There is little characterisation in this early work. The men and women are types, and exaggerated types, whose only duty is to amuse. Peacock's progress in this respect continued steadily throughout his life, until in *Gryll Grange* he created living beings, whose personality may be viewed in various aspects. But this was never a strong point with him, and even his last book will not bear comparison with the works of the artists in character-drawing. The desideratum of a Peacockian character is that he shall be able to talk. The best in the early novels are good disputants: in the later, they are good conversationists. The talk in *Headlong Hall* is formal, finished, precise, witty, learned, possessing all the qualities, in short, in which conversation in England is invariably lacking. Over their wine the speakers make dissertations,

trespassing by their length alone on the forbearance of the listeners. Each man is allowed to state his case to the bitter end, and is similarly answered. They grow heated, but not careless. They wrangle, and even quarrel violently, in rigidly grammatical and accurately punctuated sentences of perfect balance. Yet we read it all with avidity, for the sake of the wit, the neatness and ingenuity in the manner of stating the various points of view, and for the ridiculous picture of the discomfited and enraged theorists. Perhaps the only one whom we would fain hear no more of is Mr. Jenkinson, the equable philosopher who will countenance neither optimism nor pessimism. The plot, such as there is, is amusingly brought to a point by means of the skull of Cadwallader, and a happy ending given to a most felicitous *jeu d'esprit*. More than any other author perhaps, Peacock interests us himself throughout the book. To all the characters he has given qualities to amuse and hold our attention ; his partiality for Escot arouses curiosity about his own personality. We have enjoyed his method and, above all, his style. But is this all ? Does he care for nothing but the logical faculty, generally used in confuting whatever statement is made in his presence ? From this book he



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does indeed seem to be an arch-antagonist and disbeliever. His style is his chief virtue. To give adequate examples would take up too much space: but there is one remarkable passage, showing very clearly his affinity with the great prose writers of the previous century, that may be quoted, describing the scene which the three philosophers had set out on their walk to visit. It is an illuminating proof of the graphic and suggestive effect obtainable by judicious selection and combination of ordinary words. It shows also one of Peacock's genuine enthusiasms, the love of natural scenery:

They now emerged, by a winding ascent, from the vale of Llanberis, and after some little time arrived at Bedd Gelert. Proceeding through the sublimely romantic pass of Aberglaslynn, their road led along the edge of Traeth Mawr, a vast arm of the sea, which they then beheld in all the magnificence of the flowing tide. Another five miles brought them to the embankment, which has since been completed, and which, by connecting the two counties of Meirionydd and Caernarvon, excludes the sea from an extensive tract. The embankment, which was carried on at the same time from both the opposite coasts, was then very nearly meeting in the centre. They walked to the extremity of that part of it which was thrown out from the Caernarvonshire shore. The tide was now ebbing: it had filled the vast bason within, forming a lake about five miles in length and more than one in breadth. As they looked upwards with their backs to the open sea, they beheld a scene which no other in this country can parallel,

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and which the admirers of the magnificence of nature will ever remember with regret, whatever consolation may be derived from the probable utility of the works which have excluded the waters from their ancient receptacle. Vast rocks and precipices, intersected with little torrents, formed the barrier on the left: on the right, the triple summit of Moëlwyn reared its majestic boundry: in the depth was that sea of mountains, the wild and stormy outline of the Snowdonian chain, with the giant Wyddfa towering in the midst. The mountain frame remains unchanged, unchangeable; but the liquid mirror it enclosed is gone. The tide ebbed with rapidity; the waters within, retained by the embankment, poured through its two points an impetuous cataract, curling and boiling in innumerable eddies, and making a tumultuous melody admirably in unison with the surrounding scene. The three philosophers looked on in silence, and at length unwillingly turned away.

It was probably immediately after writing *Headlong Hall* that Peacock began the unfinished *Calidore*. It is the longest of all his fragments of stories, but unlike most of the rest in consisting of detached pieces, the connection between them not being always clear. The portions thus preserved are in a highly finished state, but do not constitute sufficient data for fruitful speculation as to the ultimate form the story was to take or the probability of its success. They have been published by Dr. Garnett, and the manuscript is also preserved. The handwriting shows that it was written in haste, but beyond

proving it to be a comparatively early work gives no indication of its date. There is however very strong internal evidence on this point. Through the whole series of Peacock's studies of contemporary life a reliable criterion of comparative chronology is afforded in the treatment of the clergy. From the Rev. Dr. Gaster to the Rev. Dr. Opimian his clerics mark progressive stages along the path from bigotry and bestiality to urbanity and enlightenment. The parsons of *Calidore* are stationed very near to the starting point. The application of this test might indeed almost lead to the conclusion that this was Peacock's earliest attempt in prose; but this is rendered unlikely by the close affinity with *Melincourt*, first, in the prominence of the paper money question in both works, and secondly in the whimsical character of their heroes, both strangers to the civilisation by which they find themselves surrounded. But whereas Sir Oran is a silent enigma, whose actions, now more and now less than normal, provide a commentary on everyday life, Calidore is a highly accomplished being, almost a terrestrial angel, hailing from Terra Incognita and provided with gold coins inscribed "Arthurus Rex."

He comes ashore on the coast of Wales in a little skiff, which, after he has disembarked, he

folds up "to the size of a prayer book" and pockets. His approach and landing are watched by the Misses Ap-Nanny, the younger of whom falls in love with him on the spot, a courtesy which he as promptly reciprocates. Their conversation is missing. The next scene takes us to the inn where the traveller puts up for the night. In the parlour are two parsons, not, alas, of the genial tribe of Drs. Folliott and Opimian, but mean and morose, though of course drunkenly. The stranger begs them to partake of a magnificent supper, and this, added to the ale they have already absorbed, causes an expansion and exhilaration of their sulky and torpid spirits. Calidore profits by this in discovering that one of them is the father of the beautiful creature whom he had encountered on the sea-shore, and accepts his invitation to breakfast next morning. Presumably on that day, Ap-Nanny interviews Calidore, demanding to know what he means by making love to his daughter. He supposes that the young man has heard she will have a dowry of a thousand pounds. Calidore thereupon scatters a handful of gold, which he calls "mere dross" on the table and floor. The astonishment of the clergyman is two-fold: first, as he had seen nothing but paper money for twenty years, at

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the metal, and afterwards at the "phenomenon of a crowned head with a handsome and intelligent face." This, by the way, is the only satirical reference to the House of Hanover in the whole of Peacock's writings. The profusion of coin disposes in part of his suspicions, and he repeats in a more kindly tone: "What do you want with my daughter?" Calidore proposes marriage, mentioning Venus, Cupid and Juno Pronuba in the same breath. The reverend gentleman feels that he is being ridiculed and insulted: Calidore protests solemnly "by the sacred head of Pan," and by the oath apparently ruins his chance of success.

No more is related of Calidore's love-making or his sojourn in Wales. The mythological expressions at the conclusion of the last fragment furnish a sufficient clue to determine the place of the next in the general scheme. Arthur, Gwenevere, Merlin and the rest of their company land on a remote island and are met by two of the inhabitants, "one in the appearance of a young and handsome man with a crown of vine leaves on his head; the other a wild and singular figure in a fine state of picturesque roughness, with goat's horns and feet and a laughing face." Mutual introduction follows and Sir Lancelot, on learning that the two strange beings are

Bacchus and Pan, immediately denounces them as evil powers. The speech of Bacchus in answer to this piece of discourtesy is a characteristic passage of Peacockian eloquence. The Gods, he says, never stood in great need of mankind, but were fond of them and took pleasure in their sacrifices, their magnificent temples, their religious rites with the joyous singing and dancing : the appearance of joyfulness is of all most acceptable to the immortals. But a time came when men began to abuse the Gods, break their images, miscall them by ludicrous and ill-sounding names. They built dismal structures in place of the temples and changed their glad worship for attitudes of misery and doleful chants. The Gods, in horror and dismay at the change, ceased to frequent the earth and retired to hold a council and discuss what was to be done. Jupiter informed them that Necessity, the ruler of all—and here Peacock adapts his favourite Ahrimanic philosophy—compels him “to acquiesce for a time in this condition of things ;” and he migrated with all the other deities to the one lonely island reserved for their dwelling-place during the supremacy of the opposing principle. Here then they remain, the greater deities at the top of a mountain, and Pan and Silenus with the Fauns and Satyrs in the valleys.

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"Now I have only this to say," he concludes, "that if you come here to make frightful faces, chant long tunes, and curse each other through the nose, I give you fair warning to depart in peace : if not we shall find no trouble in expelling you by force." The Arthurians, partly persuaded and partly overawed, fall on their knees and make submission, begging to be received and allowed to dwell on the island ; "for if you banish us from this happy shore, our vessel must wander over the seas for ever, like the Flying Dutchman that is to be."

Without this fragment it would be hard to explain why Calidore should swear by the Gods of Greece. By its help, we can easily supply a missing section of the story. When the cult of Arthur declined, he and his company went on board a ship and sailed away from the shores whereon there was no longer any place for them. They reach the abode of the Gods, exiled in like condition. They are converted and dwell there, Arthur keeping his kingly state. After the lapse of centuries, they send Calidore to sojourn twelve months in England to spy out the land, and report if there are any signs of the time approaching when Arthur may return, and incidentally to collect as much information as he can.

The last fragment, almost the longest, gives a glimpse of Calidore in London. He has taken his gold to the Bank to exchange it for the currency of the country, and is astonished at receiving "several slips of paper." The remainder of the piece shows his failure to comprehend a state of society in which promises to pay are accepted as payments.

And here the fragment comes regrettably to an end. Interesting in more than one respect and most delightfully written, it is just sufficient to awake desire to follow the strange visitant further, to watch the humorous light of his simple logic playing upon the ugliness and convention of Georgian civilisation. What would have been the course of the story, and why was it abandoned? A partial answer to these queries may be hazarded, founded by a hint dropped by Calidore in his talk at the breakfast table. He says that at the end of a year he is to return, taking with him a wife and a philosopher. The wife is already in view; the philosopher might, according to the author's mood, either not have been forthcoming, or have been supplied in the person of Mr. Thomas Love Peacock, his favour ingenuously defeated with a usurped beard. The latter quest would at any rate have proved the least amusing of the two. Already two



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windmills, the Church and Paper Money, have been combated by this knight-errant. His philosophical encounters are rather to be dreaded with *Melincourt* fresh in the memory. It may be that the unwritten chapters of this romance would have added little to our pleasure.

For if *Calidore* is but an appetiser, *Melincourt* is more like a surfeit. This is the more to be lamented, as the book not only contained many of the elements of success but does actually include some of Peacock's best writing. Shelley considered this far superior to either *Headlong Hall* or *Nightmare Abbey*. His philanthropic seriousness led him to admire most, in the works of his friend, precisely those parts and those aspects which appear to modern readers either ponderous or negligible. The light-hearted appeal of the third novel was not lost on him, but even in that instance he was not satisfied till he had looked, as he said, "a little deeper," and discovered in the ineffectual zeal of the hero "what Jesus Christ calls the salt of the earth." He paid the highest compliment, according to his own nature, to the tales of Peacock in regarding them as moral and political tracts. Hence his preference for *Melincourt*. He perceived in it more "true spirit" and definite purpose than in either of the others. We who

live in a more fastidious time, and one not clearly animated by any great principle of reform, shall be inclined to reverse this judgment. We find in this work large tracts where the true spirit is manifestly lacking, and where the definite purpose of the author has overpowered and pressed him to the earth. Literary form is outraged more here than in any other of his works ; and the interpolations, far from justifying themselves as passages which we should have been sorry to miss, are in almost every case conspicuously those which try our patience the most and could best have been dispensed with.

A simple criterion, too seldom applied in criticism, will reveal at once the technical and spiritual faults of *Melincourt*. The removal of its dullest portions will reduce the book to a reasonable compass, while leaving the plot intact, and will moreover restore a true balance between the relative importance allowed to the characters. Mr. Forester is a ponderous and gullible person, easily led astray, and dragging the wearied reader with him, into the more arid pastures of the intellect. Greater blame attaches to his subjugator, the merciless and prosy Mr. Fax. Most of their conversation together should be torn out of the book, including the episode of Desmond, the paper money scenes, and one or

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two more chapters of the peregrination in search of Anthelia, who, to tell the truth, was not worth so much trouble. Lightened by the jettison of these passages, together with all the notes from Buffon, Rousseau, Lord Monboddo and other sources, *Melincourt*, reduced in bulk by one fifth, would have been well able to bear comparison with the author's best books. As it stands, it is the easiest to abuse and decry.

Peacock's conduct in this story is indeed reprehensible. He basely neglects the legitimate hero and devotes pages and chapters on end to the sermons and disputations of the pretender. An effort of memory is constantly needed to enable the reader to realise that Sir Oran is in the company of Mr. Fax and Mr. Forester during the whole of their expedition. His is but a too typical case of the sacrifice of the higher to the lower type. His instincts are so much in excess of the chivalric rules of courtesy that though he is eager to avenge an insult to the weak and unprotected a personal affront seldom touches him at all. He trudges along, mile after weary mile, making no protest at the ill-mannered neglect with which he is treated by his companions. Poetic justice, of which he is so able a dispenser, would demand that he should extend his powerful fingers to comprise the necks of the

garrulous offenders and, receiving at the same time the gift of speech, flourish his cudgel and cry, like the innkeeper of old, "No more of this, by Goddes bones!" But he is silent and gives no sign of impatience. It is noticeable that the excision of the passages above mentioned would restore to Sir Oran his due prominence in the story.

In thus leaving his work disfigured by unessential and uninteresting excrescences Peacock is guilty of the sin of incontinence, comparatively trivial and pardonable. But its grave blemish is in the characters of Anthelia and Forester. These priggish and pretentious young people, with no humanising inconsistencies, whose disapproval of the rest of mankind is unenlivened by any spark of humour, can excite no sympathy. Their courtship and marriage fail to interest. They are undoubtedly made—and too obviously!—for each other; though it seems a pity that they should be allowed to perpetuate their kind, it is as well that they should be out of the way together. Could damaging criticism go further? The story, sufficiently long in its essential features, eked out with dull interpolated disquisitions; the hero apparently forgotten for long stretches together; three of the four principal personages insufferable: how many

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legs has the book left to stand on ? is it in any degree readable ?

That it is eminently so, is a striking proof of the rare quality of Peacock's genius. The faults, which damn it as a novel, do but detract from its value as a Peacockian novel, a literary genus by itself with no satisfactory name to distinguish it from apparently similar forms. The personal incidence of the satire has already been discussed. Directed, now against mankind in general, now against the representative system, now against a parliamentary or literary group and now against some private fad or enthusiasm, it ranges from the broad and boisterous to the sly and subtle manner. Sir Oran Haut-ton has been most unjustly treated and the author accused of endowing an ape with human qualities in order to heap ridicule on mankind. Such a procedure would indeed be but a laboured piece of burlesque. A similar method had been adopted by Swift, and legitimately used for the most bitter and misanthropic satire. His is a weapon of wholesale slaughter ; in his use of it he may command admiration but can evoke little sympathy. Horses, he cries, are nobler animals than men, and men more debased than monkeys. If you protest, you do but assert your kinship with these despicable beings. Peacock's method is

essentially different. "An ape" is precisely what Sir Oran is not. The scientists and philosophers have described him, and Peacock, collecting and welding their statements, shows that they have discovered an almost ideally perfect man, a human being who though unacquainted with the arts of civilisation has all the instincts and puts into practice all the precepts of true nobility. He is the ever-ready champion of innocence against oppression and villainy. Gentle, unobtrusive, dignified, he is an ornament to the most polished society: powerful and impulsive, he always submits to the ruling of those whose reason and familiarity with the circumstances he feels to be superior to his own. Every detail of the picture, his graces and accomplishments, his social adaptability, the propriety of his table manners, his taste and capabilities in music, all these had been vouched for by the learned authorities. Had Peacock added anything to what was already common property, the shafts of his satire would have been blunted and retarded. By his reticence and skilful handling of the character he presented to contemporary civilisation its own scientific discovery, the outcome of its own wisdom and research, to hold up the mirror to it. He mocks simultaneously at human

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credulity and incredulity ; for while he pursues with his ridicule the believers in *homo sylvestris* he has Parthian shots for those who follow after him protesting their unbelief. The incredibility of a being in whom are united all these ideal qualities arises, not from the supremacy of reason, but from the decline in morals.

The lyrics in *Melincourt* are uninspired. The best and most appropriate is the absurd character song by the members of the secret committee at Mainchance Villa, giving a neat finish to the scene and summing up the political attitude of the conspirators in the imaginary crisis. "The Ghosts" is a jovial drinking song ; "The Magic Bark," the most ambitious attempt, is elaborate but conventional. But if the book is thus deprived of a subsidiary interest, regularly expected in these novels, it is rich in a few passages of fine classical prose. The first chapter may be cited as an example of the author's style at its best. Short, simple in language, admirably smooth and perfectly articulated, it is made up of twelve small paragraphs and is crystallised into eight distinct points of irony. In strikingly few words an adequate and interesting description of the Castle and its surroundings is conveyed and this without any effort of emphasis or picturesque diction. To read it is to be present

at one of the occasional exhibitions of eloquence by a man of reserved nature. His habitual continence and dread of verbiage are a guarantee against the tedium which is almost inevitably a result of the outpourings of those whose enthusiasm lies nearer to the surface and is less under control. His disclosures of feeling possess a charm by no means to be accounted for entirely by their rarity: this only adds to their value by making them more concentrated and personal. For on ultimate analysis it is the personality of the speaker that is the source of delight; not the accurate or vivid presentment of the scenes, but his suppressed emotion in contemplating them. The same departure from a consistently jesting or critical mood was noticed in the description of the prospect from the Traeth Mawr embankment. The passionate love of scenery again lures the author from his cave of concealment in the chapter called "The Torrent," relating the setting forth of Anthelia for a country ramble, the suddenly bursting storm and the swelling torrents which cut off her retreat from her perilous position. In an entirely different style, but of equal merit, are the descriptive passages in the two chapters telling of the elections at the borough of Onevote. Though obviously comparable with many pages of Fielding, in style



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and language they are intensely individual. Heroic incidents are in the author's mind as he writes ; but he does not, like Fielding, make use of epic diction and tags of ancient verse to produce a mock-heroic effect. In plain and almost scientifically exact language it is shown how a small cause led to a greater effect, which in turn proved to be but an early link in the chain of consequence. The comedy is thus objective and cumulative, arising from a clear and faithful report of an incident, by one standing as it were on an eminence overlooking the scene, and thus able to explain what was unintelligible to the excited participants. This attitude of Olympian detachment is beautifully illustrated in the account of the attempt to "chair" Sir Oran, with its unfortunate result :

Mr. Sarcastic stepped into his chair ; and his part of the procession, headed by Mr. Christopher Corporate, and surrounded by a multiform and many coloured crowd, moved slowly off towards the city of Novote, amidst the undistinguishable clamour of multitudinous voices.

Sir Oran Haut-ton watched the progress of his precursor, as his chair rolled and swayed over the sea of heads, like a boat with one mast on a stormy ocean ; and the more he watched the agitation of its movements, the more his countenance gave indication of strong dislike to the process ; so that when his seat in the second chair was offered to him, he with a very polite bow declined the honour. The party that was to carry him, thinking that his re-

pugnance arose entirely from diffidence, proceeded with gentle force to overcome his scruples, when not precisely penetrating their motives, and indignant at this attempt to violate the freedom of the natural man, he seized a stick from a sturdy farmer at his elbow, and began to lay about him with great vigour and effect. Those who escaped being knocked down by the first sweep of his weapon ran away with all their might, but were soon checked by the pressure of the crowd, who, hearing the noise of conflict, and impatient to ascertain the cause, bore down from all points upon a common centre, and formed a circumferential pressure that effectually prohibited the egress of those within; and they, in their turn, in their eagerness to escape from Sir Oran (who like Artegall's Iron Man, or like Ajax among the Trojans, or like Rodomonte in Paris, or like Orlando among the soldiers of Agramant, kept clearing for himself an ample space in the midst of the encircling crowd), waged desperate conflict with those without; so that from the equal and opposite action of the contripetal and centrifugal forces resulted a stationary combat, raging between the circumferences of the two concentric circles, with barbaric dissonance of deadly feud, and infinite variety of oath and execration, till Sir Oran, charging desperately along one of the radii, fought a free passage through all opposition; and rushing to the barouche of Sir Telegraph Paxarett, sprang to his old station on the box, from whence he shook his sapling at the foe with looks of mortal defiance. Mr. Forester, who had been forcibly parted from him at the commencement of the strife, and had been all anxiety on his account, mounted with great alacrity to his station on the roof; the rest of the party was already seated; the Honourable Mrs. Pinmoney, half fainting with terror, earnestly entreated Sir Telegraph to fly; Sir Telegraph cracked his whip, the horses sprang forward like racers,

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the wheels went round like the wheels of a firework. The tumult of battle, lessening as they receded, came wafted to them on the wings of the wind ; for the flame of discord having been once kindled, was not extinguished by the departure of its first flambeau—Sir Oran ; but war raged wide and far, here in the thickest mass of central fight, there in the light skirmishing of flying detachments. The hustings were demolished, and the beams and planks turned into offensive weapons : the booths were torn to pieces, and the canvas converted into flags floating over the heads of magnanimous heroes that rushed to revenge they knew not what, in deadly battle with they knew not whom. The stalls and barrows were upset ; and the pears, apples, oranges, mutton pies, and masses of gingerbread, flew like missiles of fate in all directions. The sanctum sanctorum of the ale was broken into, and the guardians of the Hesperian liquor were put to ignominious rout. Hats and wigs were hurled into the air, never to return to the heads from which they had suffered violent divorce. The collision of sticks, the ringing of empty ale casks, the shrieks of women, and the vociferations of combatants, mingled in one deepening and indescribable tumult ; till at length, everything else being levelled with the heath, they turned the mingled torrent of their wrath on the cottage of Mr. Corporate, to which they triumphantly set fire, and danced round the blaze like a rabble of village boys round the effigy of the immortal Guy. In a few minutes the ancient and honourable borough of Onevote was reduced to ashes.

From the philosophical disquisitions of *Melin-court*, threatening towards the close of the book to swamp his fancy and dull his genius, Peacock turned for refreshment to poetic romance, and

to that past age whose beauty had for him so irresistible a charm. The speech of Bacchus to the new arrivals in *Calidore* showed how the new and dismal influences at work among mankind rendered them unfit for the worship of the old Gods. The musical lines at the opening of Canto III. of *Rhododaphne* are a lament for the state of man, deprived of the inspiration and consolation arising from spiritual intercourse with the genii of nature. It is vain to call upon these godheads now : the world has lost them and their worship is but a half-understood tradition. He who cherishes their memory, and would fain make them the recipients of his prayers and the objects of his joyful hymns, must hold intercourse with them, as with the dead, through the medium of books and imaginative contemplation. By long years of enthusiastic study Peacock had made himself acquainted with the main and by-roads of Greek history, religion and art. Where the ordinary graduate learns some of the associations of a proper name, because without the resultant commentary a passage in Horace would be unintelligible, Peacock knew the place or person alluded to from independent reading of the mythologists, topographers, historians and other authors on his shelves. He knew ancient Hellas as a man knows the lanes and

footpaths of his boyhood : his love for it was like the love of a district where every meadow and stream evokes a memory. This "cold scholar" had such a living knowledge and passionate love of antiquity that he seems separated from it not by untraversable centuries, but by mechanical obstacles. His familiarity with the classics was of a kind that few, even in his time, could appreciate ; and it may be imagined that the professors would have refused their consent to many of his conclusions and preferences. Smaller men have asserted with much satisfaction that he was not an exact scholar. Some of their proofs are highly unconvincing ; but, could the case be proved to the hilt, what a plea for inexactitude would they not establish !

If knowledge, taste, enthusiasm, and a musical ear could produce a fine poem, *Rhododaphne* would be a masterpiece. Though it is not that, it marks a great advance on his previous attempts at verse-writing on a large scale, and has the merit, unusual in all but the very highest narrative poetry, of being readable. Such a blessing is rather to be thankfully accepted than minutely explained. But without a tedious analysis two qualities, of subject and manner, are immediately recognisable as contributing to the superiority of this poem to its pre-

decessors. It is a classical tale with classical illustration and imagery, not a modern theme pseudo-classically treated. Moreover, Peacock was writing under the happiest poetic influence to which he ever submitted, that of Coleridge. Had the *Essay on Fashionable Literature* been lost, this poem would prove that he had studied and admired *Christabel* and *Khubla Khan*. The metrical innovation is used by Peacock much more sparingly than by its inventor ; but it is exceedingly grateful and effective in speeding, lightening and adding variety to the octosyllabic verse.

The first three cantos move easily through a series of incidents taking place on the same day, with a happy distribution of description and narrative. Anthemion's approach to the altar of Love, the withering of his garland of wild flowers, the sympathy of the strange maiden, who gives him a blossom of the rose-laurel ; his lonely wandering, discovery of the witchery, and the rite whereby he attempts to exorcise it ; his second meeting with her, and her second and more potent spell ; all these are described in a series of pictures, with the sacred and historic locality as background and full of the poetry of nature. Had the poem been left at this point it would have merited high praise as

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a fragment ; its last half, on the other hand, provides the best explanation of the abandonment of *Ahrimanes*. For, having worked out his original idea and shown the first weaving and confirmation of the charm, Peacock lacked invention to fill out the story with sufficiently interesting details. The narrative of Canto IV. begins with a line which it would be malicious to quote : nevertheless from this point, with the decline in narrative interest, comes a lowering of poetical tone. Good passages occur again before the end of the poem. Shelley was especially fond of the opening of Canto V. :

Shed not thy tears, where love's last rest  
Is sweet beneath the cypress shade ;  
Where never voice of tyrant power,  
Nor trumpet-blast from rending skies,  
Nor winds that howl, not storms that lower,  
Can bid the sleeping sufferer rise.  
But mourn for them who live to keep  
Sad strife with Fortune's tempest rude ;  
For them who live to toil and weep  
In loveless, joyless solitude ;  
Whose days consume in hope, that flies  
Like clouds of gold that fading float,  
Still watched with fondlier-lingering eyes,  
As still more dim and more remote. . . .  
Man's happiest lot is not to be ;  
And when we tread life's thorny steep,  
Most blest are they who, earliest free,  
Descend to death's eternal sleep.

Two years later the sentiment of them was to receive ultimate expression in the stanzas of *Adonais*. The description, in the next Canto, of a lonely cottage with rank, neglected garden, is lit by one of the last flickers of the torch. Perhaps the greatest disappointment comes with the conclusion. Had the enchanted palace been the fabric of a dream, the awakening of Anthemion and his union with his betrothed would have made a natural and fitting ending to the tale. But the spells were real and his strange adventures actual. Calliroë wakes from a charmed sleep and learns everything; and a happy ending is speedily arranged between the adaptable youth and forgiving maiden, over the very real corpse of the enchantress.

In *Rhododaphne* Peacock showed how far he had been capable of improving; also, that success for him lay not this way. He had done his best, and made his last appeal for recognition by means of a volume of verse; and afterwards apparently accepted the judgment of the public, indubitably right in this case, who preferred his prose. This brief interlude in his career as a novelist had no ill effect. On the contrary, the works following immediately after it show him in the most sparkling and happy mood to which he ever attained.



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*Headlong Hall* and *Melincourt* had been mainly satirical: *Nightmare Abbey* and *Maid Marian* are made up primarily of comedy and romance. Both pleasant and light-hearted tales, they are in many respects Peacock's best book and his worst. The first is in strict continuation of the lines laid down in *Headlong Hall*, and shows development and improvement in almost every particular. Its length is precisely the same; but in spite of the initial boldness and compression of the earlier work, *Nightmare Abbey* is fuller and more satisfying. It is a perfect miniature. Within its small compass it is many-sided and complete. The interest is more evenly divided between the characters, and each is allowed adequate expression, and with a wonderful impartiality each one is made, while he is speaking, to appear the best in the book. With more right than Mr. Flosky, Mr. Escot might be called a spectator of shadows; but he follows them up in order to discover and expose the bodies responsible for them, and bid mankind have no faith in the delusive shade. Hilary, his more genial successor, has no impostors and perverts to expose: as the author's advocate, he mingles pleasantly and most unobtrusively in the company, and only lodges an official protest against the tendency of some of the members to intro-

duce an unnecessary and exotic misery into the lot of mankind, instead of trying to make the best of it.

In form this is certainly Peacock's most perfect work. The romantic plot, worked out in the lonely tower, is skilfully brought into contact with the choice band of conversational experts who frequent the more cheerful parts of the house, and whose talk is its accompaniment and commentary. It is a Tale of Mystery, unfolded amidst a company of all the latter-day types of humanity, the credulous, the sceptical, the fashionable, the scheming, the common-sense, the frivolous and the monomaniacal doctrinaire, and receiving from each in turn indirect and provisional illumination. Wit, wisdom and folly come bubbling forth from the nine abundant springs of conversation in a rippling, dancing stream. The farcical confrontation of the unsuspecting rivals and relatives is effected by the most natural means, and causes an inevitable break-up of the house-party, bringing the story automatically to an end. To this technical perfection of outline is happily united a brilliance and vivacity of writing, the high-water-mark of Peacock's style in this second period. The art of formal conversation, each member of the party speaking strictly in character and giving summary

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and epigrammatic expression to his views, is seen at its highest point of development in Chapter XI. Mr. Cypress is on the eve of going abroad : this is perhaps his last dinner in England. On such an occasion there must of course be a *brindisi*, and the departing guest is thus addressed by the master of the house :

*Mr. Glowry.* " You are leaving England, Mr. Cypress. There is a delightful melancholy in saying farewell to an old acquaintance, when the chances are twenty to one against ever meeting again. A smiling bumper to a sad parting, and let us all be unhappy together."

*Mr. Cypress (filling a bumper).* " This is the only social habit that the disappointed spirit never unlearns."

*The Reverend Mr. Larynx (filling).* " It is the only piece of academical learning that the finished educatee retains."

*Mr. Flosky (filling).* " It is the only objective fact which the sceptic can realise."

*Scythrop (filling).* " It is the only styptic for a bleeding heart."

*The Honourable Mr. Listless (filling).* " It is the only trouble that is very well worth taking."

*Mr. Asterias (filling).* " It is the only key of conversational truth."

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*Mr. Toobad (filling).* "It is the only antidote to the great wrath of the devil."

*Mr. Hilary (filling).* "It is the only symbol of perfect life. The inscription 'HIC NON BIBITUR' will suit nothing but a tombstone."

The theme being thus stated, the talk moves more freely and in longer rhythms, first on the topic of the desirability of going abroad, and afterwards on the general subject of deterioration and perfectibility; until each one has adequately stated his position. Scythrop's revolutionary idealism, Mr. Toobad's uncompromising pessimism, Mr. Flosky's fondness for metaphysical mystery, are already known to the reader and pervade the whole book. The guest of the evening therefore assumes an appropriately prominent part in the conversation, whose main feature is the opposition of the early Byronic attitude of Mr. Cypress and the "cheerful and solid wisdom" of Mr. Hilary. The latter maintains his case bravely against the half dozen who, for entirely different reasons, are all against him. At last he makes an especially bold protest against the "mystifying and blue-devilling of society," and by so doing rouses his opponents at once, bringing the conversation back at the same time to the opening key, a sign that it is drawing to a close:

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*Mr. Hilary.* "The highest wisdom and the highest genius have been invariably accompanied with cheerfulness. We have sufficient proofs on record that Shakespeare and Socrates were the most festive of companions. But now the little wisdom and genius we have seem to be entering into a conspiracy against cheerfulness."

*Mr. Toobad.* "How can we be cheerful with the devil among us?"

*Hon. Mr. Listless.* "How can we be cheerful when our nerves are shattered?"

*Mr. Flosky.* "How can we be cheerful when we are surrounded by a *reading public*, that is, growing too wise for its betters?"

*Scythrop.* "How can we be cheerful when our great general designs are crossed every moment by our little particular passions?"

*Mr. Cypress.* "How can we be cheerful in the midst of disappointment and despair?"

*Mr. Glowry.* "Let us all be unhappy together."

*Mr. Hilary.* "Let us sing a catch."

*Mr. Glowry.* "No: a nice tragical ballad. The Norfolk Tragedy to the tune of the Hundredth Psalm."

*Mr. Hilary.* "I say a catch."

*Mr. Glowry.* "I say no. A song from Mr. Cypress."

*All.* "A song from Mr. Cypress."

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The song that follows is, as has often been remarked, not a parody of Byron but a Byronic poem. Mr. Hilary again insists upon a catch. The clergyman comes to his help and together they sing the inimitable

### “SEAMEN THREE.”

Seamen three ! What men be ye ?  
Gotham's three wise men we be.  
Whither in your bowl so free ?  
To rake the moon from out the sea.  
The bowl goes trim. The moon doth shine,  
And our ballast is old wine ;  
And your ballast is old wine.

Who art thou, so fast adrift ?  
I am he they call Old Care.  
Here on board we will thee lift.  
No : I may not enter there.  
Wherefore so ? 'Tis Jove's decree,  
In a bowl Care may not be ;  
In a bowl Care may not be.

Fear ye not the waves that roll ?  
No : in charmed bowl we swim.  
What the charm that floats the bowl ?  
Water may not pass the brim.  
The bowl goes trim. The moon doth shine,  
And our ballast is old wine ;  
And your ballast is old wine.

At this point only does Peacock show his preference amongst the disputants. His artistic purpose forbade him to use Mr. Hilary to crush and ridicule their arguments. The victory here

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is even more decisive than one achieved by that method. It is the spiritual vitality of the cheerful wisdom which triumphs. "The whole party, in spite of themselves, caught the contagion and joined in chorus at the conclusion, each raising a bumper to his lips."

The glory of this chapter is its pure fun, which is sufficient to captivate the reader, however unsuspecting he may be of the satirical intent. More farcical still on the intellectual plane is Marionetta's interview with Mr. Flosky. His mysterious absurdity is the metaphysical counterpart of the actual mystery of Scythrop's lonely tower. When the Welsh squires in *Headlong Hall* went to the library in the expectation of seeing a conjuror, they received instead instruction, concealed in a baffling mist of words. Poor Marionetta really desires information, but she finds a verbal juggler who refuses to do anything but show off his tricks. He is far more amusing than Mr. Cranium. His long words are more telling, his personality more convincing: moreover his exhibition has the geniality of an impromptu conversation as opposed to the stiffness of a lecture. He is interrupted in the composition of a mournful ballad:

"To what am I to attribute this very unexpected pleasure, my dear Miss O'Carroll?"

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*Marionetta.* "I must apologise for intruding on you, Mr. Flosky; but the interest which I—you—take in my cousin Scythrop——"

*Mr. Flosky.* "Pardon me, Miss O'Carroll; I do not take any interest in any person or thing on the face of the earth; which sentiment, if you analyse it, you will find to be the quintessence of the most refined philanthropy."

*Marionetta.* "I will take it for granted that it is so, Mr. Flosky; I am not conversant with metaphysical subtelties, but——"

*Mr. Flosky.* "Subtleties! my dear Miss O'Carroll. I am sorry to find you participating in the vulgar error of the reading public, to whom an unusual collocation of words, involving a juxtaposition of antiperistatistical ideas, immediately suggests the notion of hyperoxysophistical paradoxology."

*Marionetta.* "Indeed, Mr. Flosky, it suggests no such notion to me. I have sought you for the purpose of obtaining information."

*Mr. Flosky* (*shaking his head*). "No one ever sought me for such a purpose before."

*Marionetta.* "I think, Mr. Flosky—that is I believe—that is, I fancy—that is, I imagine——"

*Mr. Flosky.* "The *τὸν τε στί* the *id est*, the *ciè* the *c'est à dire*, the *that is*, my dear Miss O'Carroll, is not applicable in this case—if you will permit



me to take the liberty of saying so. Think is not synonymous with believe—for belief, in many most important particulars, results from the total absence, the absolute negation of thought, and is thereby the sane and orthodox condition of mind ; and thought and belief are both essentially different from fancy, and fancy, again, is distinct from imagination. This distinction between fancy and imagination is one of the most abstruse and important points of metaphysics. I have written seven hundred pages of promise to elucidate it, which promise I shall keep as faithfully as the bank will its promise to pay."

*Marionetta.* "I assure you, Mr. Flosky, I care no more about metaphysics than I do about the bank ; and if you will condescend to talk to a simple girl in intelligible terms——"

*Mr. Flosky.* "Say not condescend ! Know you not that you talk to the most humble of men, to one who has buckled on the armour of sanctity, and clothed himself with humility as with a garment ?"

And so he continues, losing his equanimity but once, when Marionetta accuses him plainly and straightforwardly of talking nonsense. It is difficult to select from the conversations in this book, in which each speaker has a special claim to recognition. Asterias has many interesting

remarks about mermaids. Listless is perhaps the most novel figure. It is owing in great part to his character and that of Marionetta that *Nightmare Abbey* must be ranked so distinctly higher than anything that Peacock had yet achieved.

During the last three years Peacock's mood has been growing steadily more and more cheerful. Speaking first as the saturnine Escot, he next identifies himself with the idealist Forester : with the advance of his temper to that of Hilary came the best work he was to produce for many years, where the touch is as light as the satire is caustic. *Maid Marian* was composed in a mood of excessive and unchastised merriment. Written during the last months of freedom and of life in the country, it is an apotheosis of forest liberty, the happy life among primæval surroundings, governed not by arbitrary or oppressive laws but on the principles of natural justice. This exemption from all restriction, shown in the lives of Robin Hood and his followers, was accorded also by the author to himself. The plot is incoherent and uninteresting, and can hardly have cost him a moment's thought. The incidents are mostly violent and farcical, and in many cases unredeemed by any particularly humorous quality. Peacock relies extensively for the

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comic effect on a circumstance which is becoming with the lapse of time less and less funny—personal damage. When contemporaries found fourteen references to broken heads in six consecutive chapters, there may have been a hearty laugh to greet each repetition of the joke. But now, owing to our increased sensitiveness and discrimination, as well as physical degeneracy, it leaves us cold. Something more than mere impact and contusion is required to force us to "levy a contribution on our muscles." In one of the best books of anecdotes in the language it is related how a gentleman, having sent repeatedly to a doctor asking him to call, and the doctor having taken no notice of his messages, the would-be patient waited until the discourteous practitioner was passing under his window, and threw a certain bottle on his head. This is simple farce, and such laughter as it calls forth arises from the outrageous nature of the deed. The irresistible appeal is in the next sentence: "This humour pleased the Dr., and he went and saw the gent. and cured him." Similarly Peacock is successfully amusing not in his scenes of mere violence, but where he adds an element of conscious exaggeration and parody of himself. Marvellous feats of archery, valiant eating and drinking, violent assault and battery, have

figured largely in scenes which failed to amuse because they were intended to be credible. There is welcome relief in a few passages where the reader is invited to share the author's fun at his own expense and his humorous contempt for the ingenious working out of a plot. For instance: three letters are written to warn his friends of Sir Guy of Gamwell's captivity and condemnation; and Little John, "having attached them to three blunt arrows, saddled the fleetest steed in old Sir Guy of Gamwell's stables, mounted, and rode first to Arlingford Castle, where he shot one of the three arrows over the battlements; then to Rubygill Abbey, where he shot the second into the Abbey garden; then past Gamwell Hall to the borders of Sherwood Forest, where he shot the third into the wood. Now the first of these arrows lighted in the nape of the neck of Lord Fitzwater, and lodged itself firmly between his skin and his collar; the second rebounded with the hollow vibration of a drumstick from the shaven scone of the Abbot of Rubygill; and the third pitched perpendicularly into the centre of a venison pasty in which Robin Hood was making incision."

In style this is certainly the least successful and characteristic of all Peacock's tales; moreover, it is surprisingly unoriginal. Not content

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with borrowing the character of Frère Jean from Rabelais, he has made a slavish imitation of his diction, or rather, which is still worse, of that of Urquhart's translation. In some parts this comes out so strongly that a great deal of good will and patience is needed to read the chapters through. Such an unfortunate attempt at archaism is the more to be lamented as Peacock's own style is so far superior to the heterogeneous outcome of his ill-advised and ill-adapted borrowing. Yet in many parts of the book he is himself, not only in the scraps of ballad and lyrical verse, a great redeeming feature, but also in the dialogue and descriptions. The latter are indeed full of charm, owing, as almost always in Peacock's works, to the fact that here he is writing from personal experience.

The Robin Hood Ballads were not the only or the most important inspiration of the book. They were the literary source, supplying materials for the plot and the traditional basis. But Peacock had been all his life attached to the woodlands ; he has specially recorded his fondness for Bisham Wood, the New Forest and Windsor Forest, which he of course knew in their unenclosed, wild condition. This intimacy with the wild woods might in itself have been sufficient to supply him with a setting for *Maid Marian* ;

but he had actually witnessed a curious revival of the life of the free foresters which took place in the years 1814-15. This is related in *The Last Day of Windsor Forest*, published in Dr. Garnett's tenth volume. The Act for the Enclosure of Windsor Forest contained one clause so faultily worded as in part to frustrate the intention of those responsible for drawing it up. It was that providing for the surrounding of some parts of the forest with pales and the disafforestation of the rest. After the Act had come into operation the clause was interpreted by legal experts to mean that no person could be punished for " hunting, coursing, killing, destroying or taking " the deer in certain portions of the forest which, though unenclosed, were yet vested in the Crown. Profiting by this flaw in the Act, a farmer of Water Oakley began to make a regular business of killing the King's deer. He called himself Robin Hood, and gave the names of Scarlett and Little John to the two men whom he employed to help him in his lucrative sport. The Deputy Ranger would forbid it and threaten the farmer with suits at law. Robin Hood held by the Act and set the Crown at defiance, and could not be crushed. Nor was he ever overcome on his own ground. The point was settled by employing two regiments of

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cavalry to drive the deer from the open into the enclosed portions of the forest. Peacock had several times seen Robin and his men and witnessed their encounters with the representatives of the law. And though the disputants carried guns instead of bows, flourished Acts of Parliament instead of halberds and axes, and were more likely to suffer from the consequences of ruffled temper than from broken skulls, their position was an anomalous survival of the twelfth century state of affairs. The subject was brought into a curiously close and direct opposition with his sovereign ; and the old cause of jealousy, the King's deer, the wildness of the place and the powerlessness of the authorities, must have recalled the legendary days of Sherwood very vividly to the frequenters of the actual Windsor Forest.

This novel may then be partitioned, on the Manichean principle, into the legendary basis as represented in the ballads collected by Ritson, the body ; Urquhart, the spirit of evil ; and Peacock's own love of the forest and his glimpse at its old-time lawless life, the influence of good. And there is a sufficient amount of the latter to preserve it from perishing. It has little extraneous interest. The subject of legitimacy provides the satirical strain running through

the story, wherein it is shown that every argument, except heredity and divine right, for obedience to a reigning king can be used as logically and effectively for adherence to an outlaw. This is well and spiritedly set forth by Friar Tuck, but in the ultimate effect of the book it is negligible. Alone perhaps of all the novels, *Maid Marian* will be read always for what it is on the surface—a tale of wild life. The spirit of the forest is its eternal element :

For the slender beech and the sapling oak,  
That grow by the shadowy rill,  
You may cut down both at a single stroke,  
You may cut down which you will :

But this you must know, that as long as they  
grow,  
Whatever change may be,  
You can never teach either oak or beech  
To be aught but a greenwood tree.



## VIII

### THE EAST INDIA HOUSE PERIOD

**F**OR the remainder of Peacock's life there are few facts to chronicle. Fourteen years after his first promotion he was made head of his department on the death of James Mill, his chief. He held this post for twenty years, which were almost the last of the Company's existence; for John Stuart Mill, who succeeded him on his retirement, remained there only two, when the House was abolished and its business taken over by the Government.

Peacock's married life was apparently passed in perfect happiness for a decade or more. Shortly after the end of that period his wife's constitutional melancholy, so pleasing to him as a young man, seems to have developed into something permanently calamitous. She died a few years before his retirement. There were four children of the marriage. The first, Mary Ellen, was born in 1821, and was consequently about eight years old when her father presented

her with the *Misfortunes of Elphin*. Twenty years later she became the first wife of George Meredith, six or seven years her junior. The short-lived Margaret Love was the next child. A boy and a girl followed, neither of whom long survived their father.

During his tenure of office Peacock's literary output was exceedingly miscellaneous, and as scanty. If every lyric and every article written in these thirty-eight years be reckoned separately, his productions will amount to little more than one a year. It is true that he may have contributed to periodicals articles which cannot now be claimed for him : this calculation applies to his avowed publications.

A magazine article by Peacock was in itself an apparent inconsistency, if all his previous remarks on journalism be taken into account ; and his first critical essay has given rise to differences of opinion among readers, who have understood it variously as a sincere expression of prejudices by a tory-ish hater of all things modern, or a vindictive paradox, inspired by the neglect of *Rhododaphne*. Both interpretations seem to rest on a too literal reading of what was meant primarily to amuse, involving an over-serious attitude towards most of Peacock's writings. But let the logical and literal inter-

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preters read the *Essay on Fashionable Literature*, and they must draw the inference that he could not have attached any importance to an article appearing in an ephemeral collection of miscellanies. The *Four Ages of Poetry* is in fact Peacock's gravest and most elaborate joke: it is at the same time an excellent stately piece of prose, containing many shrewd remarks and sound judgments. Allowing for his preference for antiquity and ironical estimate of life, there is nothing unreasonable in the review of poetry down to the last quarter of the eighteenth century. He then proceeds to disport himself in ridicule of the Lake school, and being by this time in high good humour, denies the possibility of any more good poetry being produced. The sincerity of his conclusion may be tested by the eulogy of the "mathematicians, astronomers, chemists, moralists, *metaphysicians*, historians, *politicians* and *political economists*," who from the pyramid of science which they have built up, look down in serene contempt upon the paltry antics of the poets on the modern Parnassus.

An article on "The Poetry of Nonnus" in the *London Magazine* for October, 1822, is included in the list of Peacock's works. It would be interesting to know on what grounds it is attributed to him. The subject is, of course,

one likely to be selected by an editor who wished for a contribution from him, and the writer's method in dealing with the received notions on the subject are mildly reminiscent of his polemical procedure. With this exception there is nothing characteristic of Peacock in the article, in manner or substance ; the style is quite undistinguished ; and the defence of Southey and Darwin, author of *The Botanic Garden* and the *Loves of the Plants*, against the attacks of the critics, makes it difficult to accept this, without proof, as his work. The same pseudonym is used by a writer in a subsequent number on the "Tragic Drama of the Greeks," and is also appended to a series of translations from the tragedians by which this is followed. On the other hand, an unsigned article in the same magazine for February, 1825, is, if not by Peacock, then by the only other man in England who could have written many portions of his works. It is on the subject of bubble companies, of which, says the writer, that month had been so prolific that it ought to be named, on the French Revolution model, Bubblose. He explains, in that delightfully non-technical language that Peacock always adopted in giving account of credit transactions, the steps whereby Jeremiah Hop-the-twig grows rich by forming an imaginary company. There is a good deal

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about the company's solicitors, the "respectable" directors (who of course come out of the business with a considerable increase of "respectability"), Mr. Gudgeon, the investor, and other characters necessary to make up the *comœdiæ personæ*. The article may almost be said to be signed by some passages toward the end, for instance: By the ruin of the small investors "capital is thrown into large masses, which is a great advantage (see the *Edinburgh Review*, No. 80)."

Whether or no Peacock be the author of this article, it was in the following winter that he wrote the little volume of parodies and topical verses, issued privately twelve years later with the title of *Paper Money Lyrics*. Avowedly they celebrate the successive stages of the financial panic lasting from the beginning of November, when two large banks in the west and north stopped payment, and it was feared the London banks would do the same, till some time in March, when confidence was almost completely restored. Pan, therefore, the author of "panic terrors," opens the ball with the announcement:

The country banks are breaking ;

The London banks are shaking ;

and the first lyric represents the depositors clamouring for their balances and being pacified

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by the banker's assurances that they have plenty of gold. But Peacock's objective is seldom single. Paper money is the main subject of his song; but other pet aversions must also be touched up—financiers and economists, especially the Scotch, and his select band of poets. The reader is consequently not surprised to find that the third lyric is by R. S. Esq., Poet Laureate. This is a parody of the opening stanza of *Thalaba*, successful though not difficult. More amusing is the next, whose supposed authorship is sufficiently declared in the title: "A Mood of my own Mind: Occurring during a gale of wind at Midnight, when I was writing a paper on the Currency by the light of two mould candles." Wordsworth's extreme simplicity is well hit off, as when he says of paper currency:

I find it buys me everything that people have  
to sell;

and there is an echo of Mainchance Villa in the reference to the drink,

Which Mrs. W. brings to me, which she herself  
did brew:

Oh! doubly sweet is double X from Mistress  
double U.

Moore's contribution is a ballad of Venus and Cupid, in his favourite metre, appropriately headed with a quotation from Anacreon, with

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an intended pun on the word Papyrus. Coleridge also writes a characteristic ballad on the story of the Three Men of Gotham, mystically-financially interpreted; while Scott explains that the border warfare is still carried on by his countrymen, in the shape of dishonest business transactions. This subject, with special reference to Scotch notes, is pursued through several numbers, including one attributed to Campbell, "Ye kite-flyers of Scotland, Who live from home in ease," the final lament of the Caledonians being summed up in the phrase "Mac Banquo's occupation's gone!" The ultimate settlement, considered by Peacock to be unsound, is celebrated in the song of Margery Daw, describing the alterations and temporary adjustments of gold and paper currency.

*Paper Money Lyrics* is thus a heterogeneous production. Its historical continuity is slight, and at the present day not sufficiently interesting to act as a strong unifying element. Peacock had many objects in view, and each of these in turn assumes the prominent place. One song is obviously on the currency question; another is mainly personal satire; another is literary parody. Sometimes the author is intent upon ridiculing the Scotch, at others he is expressing his unalterable distrust of the political economists.

On the whole, he is at his best on his old themes of poetical and political satire. All that he has to say about "promises to pay" is a variation, in verse, of passages in *Calidore* and *Melincourt*; his economists are mere vulgar swindlers, and his Scotchmen the traditional comic figures of the eighteenth century, coming to England to be introduced to boots and trousers and to acquire "walth and prosperity" by cheating its guileless inhabitants. While some verses go back to what he had written many years before—there is even a distinct recollection of *Sir Proteus* in the parody of Southey—others are directly prophetic of what was to come. The history of Mr. Touch-andgo, for instance, may well have been written at this time; the expression *σκιᾶς ὄψαρ* is here applied to Coleridge, and Scott is called "an enchanter unknown." "Love and the Flimsies," one of the best parodies in the volume, is even more indicative of the direction about to be given to Peacock's literary activities. Thomas Moore had hitherto attracted little of his attention, and had not been noticed in any of his better known works. Before the publication of *Crotchet Castle* this unfortunately superficial writer was to receive at his hands a chastisement which, if criticism had the power it is sometimes supposed to possess, must have completely annihilated him.



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The first instalment was delivered in a review of his *Epicurean*, published in the October number of the *Westminster Review*, 1827. This had been founded a few years before by Bentham, the younger Mill and others of the same group. Peacock was assuredly not drawn into this circle by respect for their economic science; but through the Mills he was personally acquainted with many of them, and much of their philosophical radicalism—its free thought and principles of fearless and unbiassed enquiry, and especially perhaps its distrust of the Whigs and hostility to the *Edinburgh*—represented more nearly his own views than any other current political creed. He had long before discovered for himself, what was one of the chief points of the *Westminster* propaganda, that Whigs and Tories were, so far as social amelioration was concerned, equally inert and useless. This point of view, coupled with the fact that he was notoriously an exposé of abuses and implicitly a reformer, must, if the injustice of attaching to him a party label is to be tolerated at all, class him, with all his peculiarities, as a Radical. Distinctly Radical is the tone of his contributions to the *Westminster* whenever he has occasion to touch on questions of general policy.

Moore's *Epicurean*, however, afforded little

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opportunity for the expression of political views. What it did provide was the best imaginable material for destructive criticism, and Peacock on his side provided consummate workmanship, producing a review which is a masterpiece in its kind. Sentimentality and unsoundness can seldom have appeared so obvious and all-pervading, in a work of equal ambition, by an author enjoying so great a reputation. Whatever may be thought of Peacock's attacks on Southey and Wordsworth, his *Four Ages of Poetry*, and other passages which have proved so offensive to the lay clergy of the reading public, his handling of Moore must be admitted to be not only blameless but actively virtuous. In this article he unmasks a prosperous impostor, whose "oriental" poems had given an earnest of what he might do when he trespassed on the domain of learning. The translator of Anacreon might have been expected to take the trouble to find out, even if he did not already know, the outlines of the philosophy and social conditions of the people whom he claims to describe in his tale. Or if to go to original sources would have taxed his energy and patience too severely, he could, as Peacock points out, have been preserved from the grossest blunders by a moderately careful reading of an easily accessible author—Lucretius.

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Yet it is shown conclusively that in *The Epicurean* Moore has entirely misrepresented all the most prominent characteristics of the sect whose name he has used, and drawn a picture of them according to the vulgar signification of the word, as mere sybarites and seekers after immediate pleasure. To begin with his hero is a charming youth, elected on account of his personal beauty and social popularity to be head of the sect. This strange creation is persuaded by a dream, for which as an Epicurean he had a materialistic interpretation, to go in search of the secret of eternal life, of which his philosophy denied both the existence and the desirability. But it is unnecessary to follow Peacock and his victim through the various stages from the view to the death. Instances are adduced of almost every possible misconception and solecism, geographical and archæological, and especially philosophical, until Moore is absolutely gnawed to pieces. Peacock is engaged in a more important task than discrediting the author of *The Epicurean*. He is defending a grave and by no means ignoble philosophy, for which he had a particular fondness, from vulgar misrepresentation. The book nauseates him, and, like Aelian's sick lion, who, for medicinal purposes, must devour an ape, he is not comfortable until he has demolished its author.

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In 1829 was published *The Misfortunes of Elphin*, which had probably occupied his spare hours and half hours for several years. This conjecture is founded on the only definitely personal satire in the book, contained in the second chapter. "Virtual superintendence" and the rotten embankment are of course "virtual representation" and the unreformed House of Commons. The arguments of Prince Seitheny for leaving the construction as it is, and for objecting to those innovators who urge the necessity for repairing it, are not only a fair summary of a regular portion of the anti-Reform contentions of the day, but they bear a sufficient resemblance to the speeches of Canning in Parliament in 1817, to his electors in 1820 and again in the House in 1822, to justify the conclusion that in the eloquence of the Lord High Commissioner Peacock intended to parody the famous utterances of the Tory statesmen. It is therefore highly probable that this part of the book was finished at some time between the latter date and 1827, when Canning died. Some of this reasoning had been already exposed in *Melincourt*, but in *Elphin* it is introduced with greater subtlety, though in an equally farcical scene. As in *Maid Marian* outlawry was defended by all the pleas usually urged in support of

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the claims of legitimacy, so here arguments are used in favour of what is obviously wrong, which were currently put forward in defence of a cause, considered by a lessening majority to be that of patriotism and general welfare. That the embankment, says the prince, "is somewhat rotten in parts, I will not altogether deny; *that it is any the worse for that, I do most sturdily gainsay.* . . . Our ancestors were wiser than we: they built it in their wisdom; and if we should be so rash as to try to mend it, we should only mar it. . . . *There is nothing so dangerous as innovation.* . . . This immortal work has stood for centuries, and will stand for centuries more, if we let it alone." Teithrin then makes the remark, excellent in allegorical as in literal significance, that conditions are no longer the same as they were: "The level of the sea is materially altered." To this there is no answer but to deny the fact and scout the idea: "Who ever heard of such a thing!"

Yet Prince Seithenyn is a very different person from Mr. Anyside Antijack. Criminal negligence and infinite self-satisfaction must indeed be laid to his charge; but he is free from the baser attributes of his precursor—the canting sophistry, the cynical opportunism, the abusive vulgarity, the venality and deliberate preference of his

own to the national interest. Intemperance and sloth are, in comparison with these, but mild accusations to bring against any man. The blame attaches as much to society for putting a person of his character in a responsible position, as to Seithenyn for behaving as he did. It would be as reasonable to quarrel with his drink-sodden head for not enclosing a superior brain as to be angry with a port bottle for not containing refined barley-water. Intellectually he is pitiable, and he is treated by the author with extreme gentleness, not even being allowed to perish in the cataclysm which destroyed the land with sixteen prosperous towns, and drowned most of the inhabitants in their sleep, though he was personally responsible for its occurrence. Having created this character to speak the opinions of Canning, Peacock soon forgot the satirical purpose, and delivered him from a well-deserved death to fill the *rôle* of a glorious and single-minded drunkard.

His preservation and the importance of the part subsequently played by him gives to the plot what unity it can be said to possess ; for Elphin, though technically the hero, is in fact a principal actor in no portion of the book. He is not even a prime mover in remonstrating with Seithenyn, for he was ignorant of what was happening until

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informed by a subordinate. Afterwards his contribution to the action consists in finding the babe in the coracle, and in being carried off and imprisoned by Maelgon Gwyneth. With Seith-enyn it is far otherwise. At first he is the very tool of Destiny, the proximate cause of all joys and misfortunes to come. At his reappearance he betrays the vital secret, whose knowledge will lead indirectly to the liberation of Elphin. He and his wine from gold bring about the peaceable restoration of Gwenyvar; he it is, finally, who bears evidence to the young bard's important share in the transaction, and thus conduces to a happy ending. By linking the story of Taliesin with the Arthurian romances Peacock has introduced an element which, it must be admitted, makes for diversity rather than singleness of purpose. Yet the joining is skilfully and naturally made, and it is impossible to regret this mingling of legends, since it gives an additional interest to the story as a strikingly original presentment of the life in our island at the close of the period of antiquity, and affords the author an opportunity for that kind of descriptive writing, interspersed with ironical comparison and interpretation, in which he excels. Far greater than the artfully brought about cohesion between the various strands of the

story is the unity of spirit pervading the whole and making it, in spite of the remoteness of the theme and the shadowy nature of many of the characters, Peacock's most charming romance and perhaps the completest statement of his point of view.

The mountain scenery of Wales had always been his happiest source of inspiration : now of a sudden it becomes apparent that he was only less passionately attached to the antiquities of the country. It is, however, difficult to arrive at an estimate of the extent of his studies in this direction. It is not easy to imagine Peacock taking up any subject in a superficial manner ; his reading was most likely wide and curious ; but at every step we are baffled in the attempt to ascertain particulars of it. The only book mentioned in his letters that may have given him an interest in the subject is Evans' *Cambrian Itinerary*. This he had with him at Maentwrog in 1810. For general information we know that he read Ross of Warwick and Giraldus Cambrensis. From some semi-contemptuous remarks in the course of the story it seems probable that he had made some use of *The Mythology and Rites of the British Druids*, by Edward Davies. In this work the inundation of the plain of Gwaelod and the early history of Taliesin are both dis-



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cussed at length, from the point of view of comparative mythology. There is some evidence to suggest that he also got a good many facts and ideas from *The Heroic Elegies of Llywarch Hen*, by William Owen. Here he could have found the motto of Bardism, "the truth against the world," constantly mentioned in his writings, and many of his favourite poetic triads. His account of the different orders of druids seems to be abridged from that given in this book, which also contains the poems *Gorwynion*, imitated in *The Brilliances of Winter*, and *Ynglynion*, followed at some distance in *The Song of the Four Winds*. There remains the interesting inquiry, to which it is unfortunately not possible to give a definite answer: How far was Peacock acquainted with ancient Welsh literature at first hand?

Considering the length of time he spent in Wales between 1810 and 1813, his mental energy and love of study, and his facility in learning languages, it is difficult to suppose that he took no interest in the local speech. Yet from the evidence of his early writings, including letters, poems, and *Headlong Hall*, it can only be stated with certainty that he knew one or two of the bardic triads in English, that he had mastered the correct pronunciation and accentuation of the proper names and knew the meaning of

many of them, together with the potent word *cwrw*. This is in all probability a considerable under-statement of his actual knowledge ; but from the absence of any indications of his being preoccupied with Welsh subjects for many years after the publication of his first book, it is reasonable to presume that at this early period his acquaintance with the language and literature was neither wide nor deep. Passing on to the *Misfortunes of Elphin*, we find him not only building up a story out of two somewhat obscure legends, but filling his book with translations and paraphrases of ancient poems and with proverbs quoted in the original tongue. The latter fact seems particularly indicative. It is highly uncharacteristic of Peacock's soundness and scholarly honesty, and his hatred of the display of superficial knowledge, to quote words from a language which he did not thoroughly understand. The inference to be drawn is obvious : with his marriage came a revival of interest in Wales and Welsh things, and, very likely with his wife's help, he no doubt studied for some time with his habitual assiduity, until he could read currently enough the poems and prose required for his purpose.

However slight or however intimate was his knowledge of the ancient authorities, Peacock's

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total indebtedness to them is comparatively small, either for the details of the plot or for the ultimate pleasure derivable from reading the book. It is true that the poems are a great feature of this tale; but the best two, the *War Song of Dinas Vawr*, and the *Circling of the Mead-Horns*, are original; and the third in order of merit, the *Song of Gwyddno* is (if one may judge by the literal version) vastly improved by its adaptor. As for the story, the mere outline which he has taken over could not have been made to fill ten pages. By his imagination and his pictorial and satiric gift he has added to it, altered it and inwoven it with other elements, overlaid it with description and comment and given new motive-forces to its action, so that it belongs as much to him as to Wales. Starting with the mere legendary outline that, owing to the negligence of Seithenyn the Drunkard the sea was let in upon the plain of Gwaelod, Peacock makes of this four masterly chapters. He describes the situation and condition of the country, referring to the tradition of inundations in past ages, and the secular fear of the oppression of Gwenhidwy, accompanying his statements with a crisp and trenchant running commentary, his general estimate of commercial prosperity, kingship, and the morality of high Government

officials. The drunkenness of Seithenyn, his conduct in the presence of Elphin and his arguments on the subject of the embankment entrusted to his care, are presented in such a manner as to impress this character indelibly on the memory and confer on him for the first time that immortality claimed for him in the triad. The account of the storm, the gracious figure of Angharad amid the noise and confusion of the banqueting-hall, the song of the bard, the irruption of the spring tide and the escape of Elphin, Angharad and their companions along the summit of the embankment with the sea raging on each side, give to the following pages a high rank as vivid and picturesque description.

In coming to the story of Taliesin Peacock does not scruple to take liberties with his original, not merely in the matter of arrangement but in altering and adding to the incidents. The finding of the child in the salmon weir is simply narrated according to one of the traditional accounts, the greatest change being that the exclamation "Behold a radiant brow!" is attributed to Angharad instead of to one of the guardians of the weir. This was no doubt done with the intention of concentrating the interest upon his chief characters. All the mummery of the magic cauldron and the reincarnation of

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Gwion Bach is omitted here, and only given in a song towards the end of the book, with some caustic remarks as to its meaning and value.

The education of Taliesin is a succinct account of the main differences between life in a comparatively primitive period and in the early nineteenth century. In this chapter Peacock is seen, as it were, in direct contact with his subject. He gives us at the same time the fruits of his study of antiquity and of his experience of life, pointing out the permanent motives of human nature, unaffected save in the forms of their activity by the alteration in circumstances brought about by material progress. The satire here is general, but in more than one place adumbrates what is to follow shortly in *Crotchet Castle*. The Welsh of the sixth century had no political economy, no paper money, no factories "wherein the squalid many, from infancy to age, might be turned into component portions of machinery for the benefit of the purple-faced few." We are their superiors in moral science but their equals in morals, that is to say, in the possession of a few maxims, remembered in drink and forgotten in business. Patriotism was much the same then as now: "the powerful took all they could get from their subjects and neighbours; and called something or other sacred and

glorious when they wanted the people to fight for them." The inviolability of the bards corresponded to our freedom of the Press ; their unwavering adhesion to their motto of the Truth against the World, to the incorruptibility of our journalists. Their mistaken astronomy had as much effect in elevating the mind to noble contemplation as our accurate science : their medicine was as profitable to the public, though not to its practitioners, as ours. Justice was summarily administered by the King, and there was consequently no necessity for "the sweet-faced myriads of our Learned Friends."

As the people did not read the Bible, and had no religious tracts, their religion, it may be assumed, was not very pure. . . . They were observant of all matters of outward form, and tradition even places among them personages who were worthy to have founded a society for the suppression of vice. It is recorded in the triads that "Gwrgi Garwlwyd killed a male and female of the Cymry daily and devoured them ; and on the Saturday he killed two of each, that he might not kill on Sunday." This can only be a type of some sanctimonious hero who made a cloak of piety for oppressing the poor. . . .

When any of the Romans or Saxons, who invaded the island, fell into the hands of the Britons before the introduction of Christianity, they were handed over to the druids, who sacrificed them, with pious ceremonies, to their goddess Andraste. These human sacrifices have done much injury to the druidical character amongst us, who never practise them in the same way. They lacked, it

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must be confessed, some of our light, and also some of our prisons. They lacked some of our light, to enable them to perceive that the act of coming, in great multitudes, with fire and sword, to the remote dwellings of peaceable men, with the premeditated design of cutting their throats, ravishing their wives and daughters, killing their children, and appropriating their worldly goods, belongs, not to the department of murder and robbery, but that of legitimate war, of which all the practitioners are gentlemen, and entitled to be treated like gentlemen. They lacked some of our prisons, in which our philanthropy has provided accommodation for so large a portion of our own people, wherein, if they had left their prisoners alive, they could have kept them from returning to their countrymen and being at their old tricks again immediately. They would also, perhaps, have found some difficulty in feeding them, from the lack of the county rates, by which the most sensible and amiable part of our nation, the country squires, contrive to coop up, and feed at the public charge, all who meddle with the wild animals of which they have given themselves the monopoly. But as the Druids could neither lock up their captives nor trust them at large, the darkness of their intellect could suggest no alternative to the process they adopted, of putting them out of the way, which they did with all the sanctions of religion and law. If one of these old Druids could have slept, like the seven sleepers of Ephesus, and awakened in the nineteenth century some fine morning near Newgate, the exhibition of some half-dozen funipendulous forgers might have shocked the tender bowels of his humanity, as much as one of his wicker baskets of captives in the flames shocked those of Cæsar; and it would, perhaps, have been difficult to convince him that paper credit was not an idol, and one of a more sanguinary character than his Andraste. The Druids had their view of these matters, and we have ours;

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and it does not comport with the steam engine speed of our march of mind to look at more than one side of a question.

The people lived in darkness and vassalage. They were lost in the grossness of beef and ale. They had no pamphleteering societies to demonstrate that reading and writing are better than meat and drink; and they were utterly destitute of the blessings of those "schools for all," the house of correction, and the treadmill, wherein the autochthonal justice of our agrestic kakistocracy now castigates the heinous sins which were then committed with impunity, of treading on old footpaths, picking up dead wood, and moving on the face of the earth within the sound of the whirr of a partridge.

Having laid down this sound basis of interpretation, Peacock proceeds with the history of Taliesin. Besides his own inestimable comment and imaginative description, he brings to the story as told in the Hanes Taliesin as much or more than he takes from it. The characters of Seithenyn rescued from drowning, the Abbot of Glastonbury, and Arthur are his contribution. The trick played upon Rhun and its exposure by Elphin are altered and improved in detail from the original account; the love of Melanghel is put in as an additional motive for Taliesin's energy. More honour is certainly done to Taliesin in making him overcome the bards at Maelgon's court by his skill in music than by attributing his victory, with the Hanes, to magic.



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Finally the unimaginative and uninteresting incidents of the horse-race and the pot of gold of the original are replaced by the third part of Peacock's narrative, naturally brought about by Rhun's second adventure, Seithenyn's incontinence and Taliesin's astuteness in seeing how his knowledge of the queen's whereabouts may be made use of to enlist Arthur's powerful interest on the side of Elphin.

Peacock is now at the summit of his achievement. In this more than in any other of his works he appears absolutely at his ease, a master of his subject and of English prose ; a felicitous and graceful lyrical poet, a keen and caustic satirist of humanity at large, but especially of the great and powerful, a shrewd and original interpreter of history and legend, the possessor of a true gift of vivid pictorial and historical imagination. Other books may be more obviously witty, may appear outwardly more characteristic or more brilliant, but in this his genius seems surer, his touch more masterly, the general satire truer and more telling, the criticism deeper: romance here coexists with disillusionment, enthusiasm with discriminating clarity of vision. It is the book that has most enjoyment to offer to the general reader by the interest of the story, to the lover of Peacock by the intensely personal

tone of the whole, to the amateur of style by the vigour, beauty and felicity of the language.

In the year intervening between the publication of this and of Peacock's next novel appeared three articles written by him in the *Westminster Review*, on the memoirs of Jefferson, on Moore's "Life and Letters of Byron," and one entitled "The Chronicles of London Bridge." From these it may be clearly seen that twelve years of official life have not taken off any of his keenness, or caused him to acquiesce, any more than in the days of *Melincourt*, in the ways of the world. Still less have they conduced to the Toryism which has been preposterously attributed to him at this period. He is still a Radical and republican at heart, a sagacious detector of "jobs" and abuses, and a penetrating critic with an honest hatred of the meanness and self-seeking of literary people. These writings are thus interesting in themselves and useful for contradicting any false notions that may be derived from *Crotchet Castle*. That Peacock's political ideals were on the most vital issues those of the *Westminster* may be proved by one sentence. "It is time alone," he writes, "that shows whether the young popularity-carping senator is a true patriot, or a Whig, acting patriotism; whether the young soldier of a

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republic is at heart a Napoleon or a Washington.” The article on London Bridge was written on the occasion of its proposed rebuilding. Peacock’s contention is that the old bridge could be successfully altered to serve all purposes requisite and attainable, that the new bridge is unnecessary and, in short, a job on the part of those who will make a profit out of the construction. He remarks, in his old vein, that the actual bridge “was built on such unscientific principles, that it ought to have been carried away before it was finished, when it was finished, and at any given time subsequently ; but partly by the awkward contrivances of barbarous men, partly by its own obstinacy, it has stood six centuries and a quarter, amidst the perpetual prophecies of disinterested engineers that it could not stand any longer.”

But the historic publication of this year was his review of Moore’s *Life and Letters of Byron*. If his previous criticism had thoroughly undermined Moore’s reputation as a writer, this one completely took away his character as a man. One result of this was that Moore retaliated, thereby proving the justness of the article, by spreading a report that Bowring, the editor of the *Westminster*, had invited him to his house with the intention of shooting him. Thus, out

of the four occasions on which Peacock had taken notice of Moore, the first celebrated his famous duel with Jeffrey, and the last seemed likely to provoke a similar affair. This review is not technically so powerful as that of *The Epicurean*. Yet it is truly remarkable in proving that Peacock understood Byron, whom he had never met, a great deal better than many who had come into frequent personal contact with him, and how this understanding enabled him to penetrate the motives and methods of those acquaintances of the poet who had written of him. He saw quite clearly that Byron adapted his conversation to his listener, and that he was in the habit of deliberately feeding vulgar credulity and curiosity with apparently earnest utterances, which only the possessor of a superior intelligence or a greater share in the speaker's intimacy could appreciate at their true value. This practice, says Peacock, though not in itself praiseworthy, may be justified, if ever, in the case of a man in Byron's situation, "living out of society and much talked of in it, and haunted in his retirement by varieties of the small Boswell or eavesdropping genus." Leigh Hunt and Medwin are rightly consigned to this class, and the value of their reported conversations with Byron discounted accordingly. He then shows

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how Moore fell more than once into the trap, misunderstood some of Byron's remarks, and even completely mistook the meaning of his verses. Stupidity however is not his gravest charge. He proves that on one important subject, that of Byron's so-called religious infidelity, Moore had been sympathetic when in the poet's company, though for the sake of his own reputation he loudly deplores the fact in public. This, says Peacock, is "quite of a piece with Mr. Moore's system of acquiescence with the influential in all its forms." After a detailed criticism of the work, neither purely literary nor wholly personal, but intellectually fundamental, comes the verdict: the volume consists of "a series of shallow sophisms and false assumptions, wrapped up in bundles of metaphors, put forth with a specious semblance of reason and liberality, and directed to the single end of upholding all the abuses and delusions by which the aristocracy profit." In reading this article the impression of absolute soundness and mastery is not so strong as in that on *The Epicurean*. Peacock has not at any rate taken so much trouble to parade his proofs, nor has he been at great pains to disguise his prejudice. Yet it is difficult to feel much sympathy with the man who had destroyed Byron's autobio-

graphy, or even to refrain from rejoicing every time he receives a thrust.

If *Paper Money Lyrics* prepared us for Mr. Touchandgo of *Crotchet Castle*, the criticisms in the *Westminster* have sufficiently introduced Mr. Eavesdrop. This personage is usually taken to represent Hazlitt, whose *Spirit of the Age* might have entitled him to the name. The point is unimportant. It is impossible to identify the character from internal evidence, and it is therefore useless to be dogmatic. We happen to know that Peacock objected to the "small Boswells," who had betrayed what they imagined to be Byron's confessions to them; yet the general exception which had been taken to *The Spirit of the Age* as breach of confidence on a large scale would no doubt lead his readers to think that its author was shadowed in Eavesdrop. In any case the treatment of the character is slight and generalised, and he is probably intended to be no more than a type of this fresh class of unpleasant productions of the nineteenth century.

Public characters in *Crotchet Castle* are less numerous than in the first three novels. The most notorious is of course Lord Brougham, or the Learned Friend, a title happily indicating both his legal profession and his enthusiasm for education. His appearance in this book is

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sudden and unprepared, save for one or two remarks about pamphleteering societies in *The Misfortunes of Elphin*. It would appear that Peacock had refrained from saying anything against this self-advertising politician so long as the memory of his early championship of the cause of liberty remained green, and there was yet any hope that his influence might be exerted on the side of the Radical party. Up to the end of Peacock's second period such a hope had not seemed unreasonable; but exactly at that time began the series of actions and speeches which led to the final and bitter disappointment. We now know that in the year 1819 Brougham had written to Lord Grey expressing his dislike of the Radicals and urging that the Whigs should publicly announce their hostility to them. Though Peacock was in all probability ignorant of this fact, the change of tone must have become apparent at the same time. Consequently in *Crotchet Castle*—the first contemporary study for twelve years—Brougham steps at once into the full glare. He has in the interval quite displaced those who had previously attracted to themselves Peacock's bitterest criticism, and henceforth holds undisputed pre-eminence among the *bêtes noires* of the satirist. Eavesdrop is indeed spoken of with rage, but the Learned

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Friend with loathing and contempt. It is to be noted that all the incidents of his career singled out for ridicule in *Crotchet Castle* are those of the past twelve years. The late Mr. Brougham, as Peacock would have expressed it, is left entirely out of account. These incidents are, briefly, his appointment of commissioners to inquire into charity abuses; his part in the foundation of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, and his authorship of its introductory volume; his defection from the Whigs to join forces with Canning and his return to Opposition when the latter was succeeded by the Duke of Wellington; and finally his elevation to the peerage as Baron Brougham and Vaux, or, as Peacock suggests, his public assumption of the title of grand Guy Fawkes: "Thank Heaven for that! He is disarmed from further mischief."

Mr. Macquedy was immediately recognised by contemporaries as McCulloch, the political economist. The explanation of his name—"the son of a demonstration"—would tempt us to identify him with John Stuart, the son of James Mill. But independently of the consideration that contemporaries were probably right, Macquedy's avowed connection with the *Edinburgh* was applicable to McCulloch and not



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to Mill, who did not write for that review until some years later than the date of *Crotchet Castle*. As readers of Sir Edward Strachey's reminiscences may see, the incident of the paper beginning "In the infancy of society" is a recollection of a dinner at which Peacock had been bored to death by three political economists, of whom McCulloch was one, though he was not, as in the novel, the prime offender. The gentle ridicule and often respectful handling of Macquedy is a sign of Peacock's growing impartiality in many directions. It arises in this case from a realisation and acknowledgment that his dislike of the science and nationality personified in this individual was whimsical and unreasonable. From this there results an entire lack of bitterness, a discriminating satire, a humorous and personal treatment of the character which is no small addition to the value of the book as a literary work.

Mr. Toogood is sketched in far too vaguely to be claimed as either a portrait or a caricature of Owen, but an Owenite he undoubtedly is, introduced to represent the theory of co-operation, deeply studied and hotly controverted by the political economists. A similar motive accounts for the appearance of Mr. Skionar, or Coleridge, who now acts his last part in the

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Peacockian comedies. Coleridge, as has already been noticed, has gradually gone up in the author's estimation, ever since his first farcical description as Mr. Mystic. His transcendental philosophy is still represented as unintelligible and therefore repugnant. But Peacock's sympathies had been enlisted for him by his unjust treatment at the hands of the reviewers. Twice already, in *Nightmare Abbey* and in the review of Moore's *Byron*, he has publicly taken Coleridge's part, and by this time seems to be genuinely sorry for him. The most notable passage about him in *Crotchet Castle* is a distinct vindication: "Why, they say that Mr. Skionar, though he is a great dreamer, always dreams with his eyes open, with one eye at any rate, which is an eye to his gain; *but I believe* that in this respect the poor man has got an ill name by keeping bad company. He has two dear friends, Mr. Wilful Wontsee and Mr. Rumblesack Shantsee," etc. This is surely as far as a writer could be expected to go, who was an inveterate enemy of the Lake poets, German metaphysics, Toryism, and especially of ex-Radicals.

The above remarks on Coleridge are made by Lady Clarinda, so far the best drawn of Peacock's women. Indeed the only one among her predecessors who can be said to possess a char-

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acter is the light-headed coquette, Marionetta. Now for the first time he creates a woman whose part, not merely in the story but in the disputations and the satire, is prominent and important; who does not scheme, nor appeal to the men by judicious use of feminine attitudes, but can meet them on their own ground and prove an agreeable companion. Gifted with a cynical wit and shrewd sense, with a true but not unkindly perception of the foibles and weaknesses of others, equally devoid of illusions and of bitterness, she joins easily in the conversation—by no means small talk—at the Castle, with remarks whose absence would leave it appreciably poorer. In Peacock's works, through all that is merely sarcastic, all the intellectually farcical and all the superficially indiscriminate banter, there is always more or less clearly discernible the expression of his own pet theories, fancies and private preferences. The speeches of Lady Clarinda soon make it exceedingly plain, first, that she is a personal favourite with the author, and second, that he has endowed her with a number of his own qualities. The following description, for instance, though with a different implication, might be as aptly applied to his conversation as to that of his puppet: "The captain . . . could never draw from her

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any reply but the same doctrines of worldly wisdom, delivered in a tone of badinage, mixed with a certain kindness of manner that induced him to hope she was not in earnest." Many of his opinions are uttered incidentally by this character, but more significant still, he does her the supreme honour of putting into her mouth his own description of the guests at the dinner-table.

Two important characters remain, who are both used to a large extent as interpreters of Peacock's own personality; but in each case this is strangely interwoven with other and irreconcilable elements. In their theories they are largely opposed to each other; one is openly ridiculed by the author; the other is successfully controverted by Mr. Macquedy. In these circumstances it is somewhat remarkable that different readers have found Peacock's point of view, entirely and exclusively, in the doings and sayings of Mr. Chainmail or of Dr. Folliott.

Association with Shelley had made Peacock almost a propagandist. In the years of their friendship he wrote with more passion, more of the "singleness of purpose" so much desired by the poet, than he ever infused into subsequent books. In the early novels his opinions are definitely expressed and easy to discover. In

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*Crotchet Castle*, on the contrary, he has no desire to persuade ; he is impartial as far as his nature permits ; his own opinions are of less importance than those of his characters. To such an extent is this true, that they are not represented in the speeches of one or even two persons, but scattered about and divided among at least six of the party. If he had only written this book it would be impossible to state precisely the author's private point of view, though it would be a pardonable mistake to identify him, as many have done, with the gluttonous, prejudiced, reactionary, genial and captivating Doctor. But the essential error lies in seeking for positive pronouncements where only negative are to be found. During the past twelve years Peacock had been cut off from the most inspiring comradeship of his life ; those years had been passed in London and in close contact with many of the wire-pullers and axe-grinders of the day ; they had brought him more opportunities of observation and knowledge, but not more enthusiasm. The arrival of his forty-fifth birthday, if it had softened some youthful bitterness, had not presented him with a fresh stock of illusions. *Crotchet Castle*, an essentially middle-aged production, is entirely non-constructive. It is a criticism, and its main drift is an exposure of cant in all its manifesta-

tions. Sentimental cant, philosophical, philanthropic, economic cant, the cant of literary people and scientific specialists, is here represented by the usual set of typical personages. In opposition to these at various points are ranged three characters, far more individually and closely studied, who do undoubtedly express between them a large measure of Peacock's personal attitude, though they air his dislikes more freely than his likes. Lady Clarinda, the keen scrutineer of persons, and Mr. Chainmail, who regrets the ages of greater simplicity, when there was less opportunity for cant to flourish in the great variety of its present day activities, each has his marked sympathy. Yet Lady Clarinda passes sentence on her own professed philosophy by marrying a poor man; while Mr. Chainmail is convicted of the possession of illusions, approaching very near to cant, and finally violates one of his strongest principles by uniting himself with the daughter of a moneylender, "one who in the twelfth century would have been plucked by the beard." The Rev. Doctor is the most logical and, as things are, the most powerful enemy of cant. Having himself no illusions or ideals, he does not believe in those sincerely or falsely professed by others. Peacock attributes to him many of his own traits—his

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classical proficiency and partiality for Nonnus, his hatred of Brougham and all his works, his aversion to the Scotch and the political economists. But it is noticeable that he does not credit him with superior spiritual qualities. He lends him, not a wittier tongue, but a louder voice than the rest. He does not scruple to ridicule him. The Doctor becomes drunken and passionate at table, and has to be called to order ; in the argument on the Venuses he is overcome by a self-taught merchant, and left with a decidedly unintellectual side presented to the company. He is a favourite with the author and the reader, and rightly so. Most happily the Comic Spirit triumphed among the claimants to the patronage of this book. Cant is not to be seriously outpreached or philosophically dissected, but boisterously shouted down. Its arch-enemy is found not in a sermonising Forester, nor even in a stern and logical Escot, but in this worldly, dogmatic, exclusive scholar. Some of his jokes and repartees belong to a type new in Peacock's writings, showing the humour of character rather than of pure intellect. It is doubtful if he could ever stand up to Mr. Macquedy in a logical discussion : he overpowers him by violence and prejudice :

*Mr. Macquedy.* "Laughter is an involuntary action of certain muscles, developed in the

human species by the progress of civilisation. The savage never laughs."

*The Rev. Dr. Folliott.* "No, sir, he has nothing to laugh at. Give him Modern Athens, the Learned Friend, and the Steam Intellect Society. They will develop his muscles."

The frank non-morality of the Doctor, the economic philosophy of Mr. Macquedy, the sentimentality of the Captain, the airy cynicism of Lady Clarinda, the absurdity of the scientists ; in the interplay of these lies the main interest of the greater part of *Crotchet Castle*. In these conversations and comments Peacock is certainly seen at the height of his brilliance as satirist and stylist. They have the perfection of maturity—strength without violence, confidence and precision, all the old keenness with the added mellowness of time. With a wantonness peculiar to himself he has, by the mere subterfuge of an excursion up the Thames and Severn and the Ellesmere Canal, tacked on to these studies in scholarly idiosyncrasy a love story, threatening every now and then to become a pastoral romance, taking place in North Wales and entirely unconnected with the beginning and end of the story. With this as with all his wayward deeds, it is useless to ask how Peacock could have permitted himself so flagrant a violation of the



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proprieties. If we like this quarter of the book, let us thank him for it ; if its presence offends us, our capacity for enjoyment is sadly limited. It has already been pointed out that these chapters have an autobiographical foundation. In Mr. Chainmail are curiously combined Peacock's actual situation in 1810 and his mood at the time of writing *Maid Marian*. Here he goes through the same experiences of falling in love first with the mountain scenery and afterwards with a mountain maid, that had been the lot of the author twenty years before. "The Dingle" of Chapter XIV. is a ravine near Maentwrog, a haunt of Peacock's at that time ; and the strange name and parentage attributed to the girl in the story, a recognised portrait of Jane Gryffyd, are but a device to connect her with the other principal characters. When she has conquered the heart and, a more difficult achievement, overruled the principles of her admirer, one half of the author's task is completed, and we are prepared for a similar consummation on the banks of the Thames. The genial satire and the latter-day idyll alike lead up to the routing of aristocratic prejudice and of the pounds-shillings-and-pence philosophy. The final note is struck in Lady Clarinda's song :

In the days of old,  
Lovers felt true passion,

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Deeming years of sorrow  
By a smile repaid.  
Now the charms of gold,  
Spells of pride and fashion,  
Bid them say good morrow  
To the best-loved maid. .

Through the forests wild,  
O'er the mountains lonely,  
They were never weary  
Honour to pursue :  
If the damsel smiled  
Once in seven years only,  
All their wanderings dreary  
Ample guerdon knew.

Now one day's caprice  
Weighs down years of smiling,  
Youthful hearts are rovers,  
Love is bought and sold :  
Fortune's gifts may cease,  
Love is less beguiling ;  
Wiser were the lovers,  
In the days of old.

After *Crotchet Castle* Peacock's activity as a literary man came to an almost complete cessation for many years. Growing absorption in business, increasing domestic loneliness and a rapidly extending acquaintance with public men and participation in public affairs, all no doubt contributed to render him disinclined for writing. When he was engaged in preparing

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evidence for Parliamentary committees, on navigation or finance, in conferring with experts and explorers about the trade routes to India, in designing or superintending the construction of steamers, he can have had but a small amount of energy left for the work of the Comic Spirit. In 1835 he published four articles in *The London Review*—two on the opera, one being on the occasion of Bellini's death, and two on the French comic romance writers. The latter deal with the predecessors of Paul de Kock, and are professedly introductory to a more minute study of that writer; this however was never accomplished. Probably about the same time was begun the autobiographical *Chertsey*, soon abandoned and the material used for the *Recollections of Childhood*, published in 1837, almost the last of the writings of this, his third period. Two copies of verses and one article, a review of some works on Indian poetry, alone intervene between this year and the commencement of his connection with *Fraser's Magazine*, in whose pages appeared all the productions of his old age.

## IX

### “GRYLL GRANGE.”

*Vintage of fifteen.*

“**G**ASTRONOMY and Civilisation” is the title of an article in *Fraser's Magazine* for December, 1851, signed “M. M.” but easily recognisable by those who have a sufficient acquaintance with Peacock to give them a flair in these matters, as his work. When we read: “The light of the kitchen was probably the brightest spot in the dark ages,” the style and sentiment make a familiar appeal. The citation and interpretation of classical authors, the same treatment of Italian and French writers, including Paul de Kock, add to the presumptive evidence, which is strengthened again by the insertion of a bill of fare of the year 1662, from the archives of the East India Company. The introduction of two lines from the *Misfortunes of Elphin*, the current use of one or two of Peacock's favourite phrases and

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quotations, for instance, “ Ale is his eating and his drinking solely,” leave little doubt as to the authorship. But the author of *Headlong Hall* had at one time made a name for himself in the world of letters, and later on in the official world : he was known well, if not widely. This article may be the production of some unscrupulous imitator or enthusiastic admirer. So far, possibly. But turn the page, and we find a reference to the “ Adventures of Jack of Dover in search of a greater fool than himself,” so well discussed subsequently by the visitors to Gryll Grange. The same atmosphere is created by a contrasting of Bojardo and Berni ; and towards the end comes a passage paraphrased at length by the Rev. Dr. Opimian : “ We like to see our dinner,” says the writer, and proceeds to mention Addison’s objection to having the solid dishes placed on a sideboard, to express his dislike of seeing the food “ distributed like rations to paupers,” and his disapproval of leaving the carving in the hands of servants who cannot distinguish between the head and tail of a mullet and the wing and thigh of a fowl. Then follows what may be taken to be the signature : “ The fashion to which we allude will render necessary the establishment of a college of carving ; and a professor of the side-table, who has finished

his education with credit, and received his degree, will become as important a personage as the cook himself." Either, then, Peacock is the author of this article, or the writer of it imitated Peacock and copied from his early works, and was in turn plagiarised and imitated by his former victim in the pages of *Gryll Grange*. The easier supposition is also the more reasonable.

The point is not of extreme importance. Biographically it only sets Peacock's connection with *Fraser's Magazine* forward by three months, for in the following March and April appeared the first two of his *Horæ Dramaticæ*. But the article is a striking illustration of a quality which, although attention has not yet been pointedly drawn to it, must already have been noticed by the reader—our author's literary parsimony. Between the novels themselves there is not much repetition, no more perhaps than it would be reasonable to expect in the writings of a critic and satirist whose main interests were the same throughout his life. But between the novels and the minor works, including unpublished matter, contributions to the periodicals, and less known works like *Sir Proteus* and *Paper Money Lyrics*, they are exceedingly numerous. It seems as if Peacock, having once made a good joke or discovered a new truth or

analogy, was unusually loth to let it be wasted, but was always pleased to give it to the world twice over, so long as the writings containing the repeated matter were not known to be by the same author. This habit, in addition to the intensely personal flavour of his style and the originality of his criticism, makes it an easy task to identify his unsigned work. He may keep his individuality in the background so long as he is engaged in detailed and technical criticism, as in his article on the *History of Greek Literature* by Müller and Donaldson (1859); but it is impossible for him to talk to us for long together on any subject of general interest without momentarily removing the mask of the journalist and giving us a glimpse of his true physiognomy. His other articles in *Fraser* call for little particular notice. The earlier *Horæ Dramaticæ* show him not only as a sound scholar but as an imaginative critic; while the last, that on the *Flask* of Cratinus, suggests the halloo of a schoolboy at the beginning of the summer holidays rather than the sigh of relief of a man who has just retired, at the age of seventy, from a busy and responsible position. From this time onward he uses no more pseudonyms or fanciful initials, but confesses to the authorship of his articles. In 1858 came the

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first instalment of his *Memoir of Shelley*, followed by the second in 1860. From April to December of that year *Gryll Grange* appeared in *Fraser* as a serial and, as the *Edinburgh* remarked some few years later, completely mystified most of its readers, who were unacquainted with the author's previous novels.

So after the lapse of thirty years Peacock is going to talk again with us. Let us listen to him once more: it is the last conversation we shall hold with him, and, as is fitting, the most intimate of all. Several times during the long interval he has tried to break silence. In *Chertsey* he was to tell us more about himself as a young man: in *Cotswold Chace* he gave us yet another picture of his wife; here too he mentioned his boyhood and the days when he would spend half-holidays reading by the river or under the woods; and he was to give us a fuller knowledge of his youthful friend, "Charles," of the *Recollections of Childhood*. He is now old enough to regret that long past time: "Those were pleasant days. I do not think we grow happier as we grow older—as the bloom of novelty fades from life"; and again: "I am not unsocial, but society as it is now constituted is not much to my mind." In *St. Katherine* he appears at an even more advanced age; and



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what he tells us here squares well enough with what is related of him by others. A favourite amusement in the summer was an excursion by water to Newark Abbey or the ruinous tower of St. Katherine higher up the stream; and in the winter, a good fire and good company. He “cared very little about game-preserving and very much about classical literature. He had considerable liberality of opinion and was tolerant of all differences from his own, and implacable only in his detestation of tobacco, which he strictly banished to the turnpike road.” And here *St. Katherine* comes abruptly to an end. Much of this fragment was incorporated in *Gryll Grange*, where still further information about the author is plainly set forth. A handsome pension “placed him sufficiently above the cares of the world to enable him to gratify all his tastes without minute calculations of cost. His tastes in fact were four: a good library, a good dinner, a pleasant garden, and rural walks,” to which should be added, a boat on the river. “In all its arrangements his house was a model of order and comfort; and the whole establishment partook of the genial physiognomy of the master. From the master and mistress to the cook, and from the cook to the tom cat, there was about the inhabitants a sleek and purring

rotundity of face and figure that denoted community of feelings, habits and diet ; each in its kind, of course, for the master had his port, the cook her ale, and the cat his milk, in sufficiently liberal allowance." . . .

So far Peacock has been describing himself as the Rev. Dr. Opimian. "An athlete in pedestrianism," in his early days, a specialist in cookery as in classical studies, a lover above all and always of retirement and peace, he has much in common with this genial cleric. But, as in the character of Dr. Folliott and others, the identification is neither consistent nor complete. For though in many passages, notably for instance in his first conversation with Mr. Falconer, the Doctor is little more than a puppet uttering the sentiments of the author, in others he is a type—the best type as Peacock conceived it—of the country clergyman. Moreover, following his old practice, although attributing his own tastes to the Doctor, Peacock has adumbrated his personal circumstances in those of Squire Gryll and his goddaughter, while the most exact information as to his studies is contained in the account of Mr. Falconer's library. "The books of the lower circle were all classical ; those of the upper, English, Italian and French, with a few volumes in Spanish." The last words are significant.

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Peacock had learned Spanish in the last decade of his life. In his *Memoir of Shelley* he expresses for the first time an opinion on a Spanish author, and there is but one quotation in that language to be found in all his writings, at the head of Chapter XXVIII. of *Gryll Grange*.

Too full of experience to be sanguine, too uncompromising to apply any criticism but that of ideal morality, too vigorous to be wholly apathetic, incapable of changing with the times, Peacock's old age was bound to alternate between vituperative moments and the hours of happiness spent in the seclusion of his garden or study and in converse with his intimates. The remarkable lack of bitterness in *Gryll Grange* is attributable to the fact that he was growing more and more fond of the latter way of passing time, and tending less and less to hope, and therefore to care very much about public affairs. He had “retired” from following these almost as completely as from his official position. His old enemies, the Tories, seem to have vanished from the scene and given way to the Conservatives, whom he cannot place, and whose name strikes him as a misnomer. Indeed, one of the few sound things in a canting and unstable world is a glass of old Madeira, “which really is what it is called.” The Liberals have not fulfilled

the promise of 1832. Commercialism has arisen with its attendant dangers, diseases and white slavery. Brougham, Lord Facing-both-ways, has many years since definitely abandoned the party which in the old days founded such hopes on him, and spends his time making melodramatic speeches in the Lords and giving omniscient harangues to the Social Science Association, here eulogised as the Pantopragmatic Society. Lord John Russell, "the Gracchus of the last Reform," has apparently well deserved to be called "the Sisyphus of this": after agitating for twenty years for another Bill to remove the abuses left intact by the former, he at last introduces a measure in 1854, but withdraws it on Palmerston's threatening to resign. Is the author of *Melincourt* to celebrate him as a capable politician, or to regard him as Lord Michin Malecho, who means mischief? Peacock is also bitterly disappointed with America, as what old Radical could fail to be? He detests its judicial and political corruption, its savagery and its persistence in the use of slaves. He feels too that the English Government is largely to blame for allowing free trade in West Indian produce, and thus encouraging slavery in other dominions. For this he has been called a Tory. So be it: from the party point of view he was

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no doubt a traitor : but he was thinking of the slaves, not of the polling at the next election. Popular education had been begun, on the wrong lines it has not yet left, and was already showing some of its unpleasant results ; while the introduction of competitive examinations for the India Office and other Government branches seemed to promise a generation of officials of guaranteed mediocrity and the elimination of special talent.

All these are unpleasing considerations, but they trouble the serenity of *Gryll Grange* very little. Like Peacock at Halliford, its characters live a secluded life on the borders of the New Forest, where echoes from the outside reach them, though faintly, just often enough to remind them that they are better off in their rural peace than in a world where most things are going wrong. Where ambition and greed have not falsified men's outlook there is in human nature a preponderance of good. Life is eminently enjoyable to the man who prizes its really valuable aspects, and men and women both estimable and lovable :

*The Rev. Dr. Opimian.* “No doubt, of the recorded facts of civil life some are good, and more are indifferent, neither good nor bad ; but good and indifferent together are scarcely more than a twelfth part of the whole. Still, the

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matters thus presented are all exceptional cases. A hermit reading nothing but a newspaper might find little else than food for misanthropy ; but living among friends, and in the bosom of our family, we see that the dark side of life is the occasional picture, the bright is its everyday aspect. The occasional is a matter of curiosity, of incident, of adventure, of things that really happen to few and may possibly happen to any. The interest attendant on any action or event is in just proportion to its rarity ; and, happily, quiet virtues are all around us, and obtrusive vices seldom cross our path. On the whole, I agree in opinion with Theseus, that there is more good than evil in the world."

*Mrs. Opimian.* "I think, Doctor, you would not maintain any opinion if you had not an authority two thousand years old for it."

*The Rev. Dr. Opimian.* "Well, my dear, I think most opinions worth maintaining have an authority of about that age."

Here speaks the author of *Headlong Hall* : the old preferences, the old dislikes, the old criticism is here, but the tone has been mellowing since 1815, until the violence and bitterness have disappeared, leaving a greater discrimination, if less incisive force ; more human interest, if less sparkling comedy. The political mis-

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demeanours of the Lake poets even have been forgotten, and only their beauties remembered : exception is now taken, though how soberly ! to Tennyson's misconceptions and Longfellow's want of scholarship. Within the frame of the actual novel, discussion has taken the place of argument—there is not a single dispute in *Gryll Grange*—tolerance of intolerance ; satire is still present, but satire of a kind that springs more from love than from hate : Peacock has not even the heart to ridicule Lord Curryfin without more than compensating for it by making him interesting and socially popular, accomplished and courageous. Can this be the author who last wrote of Mr. Henbane and Dr. Morbific ? And so with all the rest. Can the creator of Mr. Maclaurel actually bring himself to describe a Scotch economist as Mr. Macborrowdale is here described ? Can he admit that the old physician who was called to attend Miss Gryll at the Tower was good as well as clever ? Can it be that in his happier social surroundings he has forgotten the Hon. Mrs. Pinmoney and discovered Miss Ilex ? Ay, this and much more he tells us in his last talk. Not only is there more good than evil in the world, but good may come out of evil ; misfortune is sometimes half a blessing, and disappointment often not so final as it seems at

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the time. So far *Gryll Grange* is merely an old man's edition of *Headlong Hall*. Were it not for a few outbursts, saving the book from being unduly soft, it would read almost like a general recantation.

But there is another strand of thought, the result, not of fresh experience, but of reminiscence and reflection, running through this tale, and embodied in the most whimsical character that Peacock ever drew, to which moreover he has himself given us the key. *Gryll Grange* was probably written during the eighteen months between the publications of the first and second parts of the *Memoir of Shelley*: it was in any case completed during the years when Peacock's mind was habitually dwelling upon the time, more than four decades before, when he and Shelley had been intimate friends. In the interval Peacock had acquired a lifetime of experience, in surroundings utterly unlike those in which the friends had lived, or those they had imagined or desired. Spiritually he had conquered in the ordeal. Recognition and success had mellowed and not spoiled him. As a natural concomitant, he had remained unchanged in other less fundamental but more daily noticeable characteristics: incorruptibility in his case implied and included a lack of adaptability. He had thus lived on,



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a true relic of Shelley's circle at Bracknell and Marlow, into another age. And by a curious coincidence, for it can hardly have been intentional parallelism, his last contemporary study, like the latest known comedy of his favourite Aristophanes, differs typically from its predecessors. Personal abuse and satire are reduced to a minimum ; no living character at any rate is put upon the stage for ridicule. In comparison with the early novels *Gryll Grange* is as the Comedy of Manners compared with the Old Comedy. Its comment, even when topical, is generalised ; the characters are shadows not of public life but of the imagination ; their conversation has little allusive or extraneous interest. Yet in Peacock's creative work there is always a considerable intermixture of what is easily recognisable as his own experience and observation of his friends. How far these have entered into the characterisation and speeches of many of the persons in *Gryll Grange* it is impossible to say, although one feels perfectly sure, for instance, that he had known Miss Ilex and Miss Niphet. Yet, feeling himself to be a survival of the old days, largely out of his place and happy only in retirement, he has put himself into the book ; and he has likewise introduced Shelley. But it is not entirely the Shelley of the days of *Melin-*

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*court.* In thinking over that time, one of the most natural questions for him to ask himself was : How would Shelley have developed if he had lived on, instead of dying at the age of twenty nine ? and the last paragraph of his second notice of Shelley, so significant in many respects, contains a passage especially apposite in this connection : “ I can conceive him, if he had lived to the present time, passing his days like Volney, looking on the world from his windows without taking part in its turmoils ; and perhaps like the same, or some other great apostle of liberty (for I cannot at this moment verify the quotation), desiring that nothing should be inscribed on his tomb, but his name, the dates of his birth and death, and the single word : Désillusionné.” It is this conception that Peacock has attempted in part to embody in the character of Algernon Falconer, though for the purposes of the plot he represents him as a young man.

Before accepting or rejecting this identification, the reader is asked to dismiss for the moment his own idea of the man or the poet Shelley, and to think only of Peacock's interpretation of him as expressed both in the *Memoir* and in the series of the early novels.

If we pass over the similarity of sound between Foster and Forester, and of sound and

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sense between Forester and Falconer, there is still a remarkable similarity in the treatment of the two latter characters, sufficient to make the second distinctly reminiscent of the first. Perhaps this comes out most strikingly in the manner of their presentation to the reader. In each case this is effected by a wanderer, who either is or becomes a great friend of the person about to be introduced, and who as has already been seen is intended to represent, in the first novel Jefferson Hogg, and in the last, Peacock. In each case again the wanderer comes upon an old building in a wood, lately deserted and partly ruinous, and finds it enclosed and inhabited. In each case the building is repaired in such a way that the restorations and additions are invisible from the entrance and the surrounding trees left intact. What lies behind this identity of circumstance it would be hard to say. If it were merely a fancy of Peacock's, it is hardly probable that he would have repeated it so closely in two novels. From Shelley's known predilection for walking and working, and spending as much time as possible in the woods, both in England and Italy, it seems most likely that these descriptions of woodland dwellings have reference to an ambition of his, to live in such a place. The general resemblances

in the characters of Forester and Falconer hardly need to be pointed out ; but one or two traits of the actual Shelley, which Peacock thought sufficiently salient to be chronicled in his *Memoir*, and which are attributed to Algernon Falconer in *Gryll Grange*, may be shortly stated. And amongst the most important, especially in our author's estimation, is a man's reading. The taste for Italian and Greek literature, though a case in point, is of minor significance ; for Peacock allows a fondness for these studies to most of the characters for whom he has any respect. Far more distinctive is Falconer's attachment to the novels of Charles Brockden Brown. Speaking of a number of writers of less dubious immortality by whom Shelley was particularly impressed, Peacock says : " These had great influence on his style, and Coleridge on his imagination ; but admiration is one thing and assimilation is another ; and nothing so blended itself with the structure of his interior mind as the creations of Brown." Here then is one eminently Shelleyan characteristic ; and another is to be traced in the Spanish books in Falconer's library. These, and notably the *Autos* of Calderon, are the works which chiefly led Shelley to study the language, and of which he writes enthusiastically from Italy. Indeed one wonders

whether it were altogether a chance desire, or long-postponed ambition, that led Peacock to take up Spanish in his old age, or whether he were not drawn to it by the re-reading of Shelley's letters and a determination to employ part of his newly-acquired leisure in entering as fully as possible into any hitherto unexplored region of his friend's mind.

Shelley's devotion to types of ideal beauty, his tendency to live in the immaterial rather than the material world, and to confuse the two, and the disillusionment that Peacock thought would have been his lot if he had lived on, are explicitly set forth in the *Memoir*. They are all expressed with equal distinctness in *Gryll Grange*, and may be most shortly illustrated in three scraps of dialogue, in whose sentiments there is a strange intermixture of the Shelley of 1817, and the hypothetical Shelley of forty years later, while his interlocutor is Peacock at the time of writing. Here for the last time we shall take the liberty of re-translating the names of Peacock's characters into those of their originals :

PEACOCK : At present your faith is simply poetical. But take care, my young friend, that you do not finish by becoming the dupe of your own mystification.

SHELLEY : I have no fear of that. I think I can clearly distinguish devotion to ideal beauty from superstitious belief. I feel the necessity of some such devotion to fill up

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the void which the world as it is leaves in my mind. . . .  
And the saint whom I have chosen presents to my mind  
the most perfect ideality of physical, moral, and intellectual  
beauty.

PEACOCK : I cannot object to your taste. But I do hope  
you will not be led into investing the ideality with too  
much of the semblances of reality. I should be sorry to  
find you far gone in hagiolatry. I hope you will acquiesce  
in Martin, keeping equally clear of Peter and Jack.

SHELLEY : Nothing will more effectually induce me so to  
acquiesce than your company. (Chap. IX.)

\* \* \* \* \*

PEACOCK : You are determined to connect the immaterial  
with the material world, as far as you can.

SHELLEY : I like the immaterial world. I like to live  
among thoughts and images of the past and the possible,  
and even of the impossible, now and then.

PEACOCK : Certainly there is much in the material world  
to displease sensitive and imaginative minds ; but I do not  
know anyone who has less cause to complain of it than you  
have. . . .

SHELLEY : It is not my own world that I complain of.  
It is the world on which I look "from the loopholes of  
retreat." . . . I look with feelings of intense pain on  
the mass of poverty and crime ; of unhealthy, unavailing,  
and unremunerative toil, blighting childhood in its  
blossom, and womanhood in its prime ; of "all the  
oppressions that are done under the sun."

PEACOCK : I feel with you on all these points ; but there  
is much good in the world ; more good than evil, I have  
always maintained. (Chap. XI.)

\* \* \* \* \*

PEACOCK : You look as little like a disappointed man as  
any I have seen. . . .

SHELLEY : We are all born to disappointment. It is as

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well to be prospective. Our happiness is not in what is, but in what is to be. We may be disappointed in our everyday realities, and if not, we may make an ideality of the unattainable, and quarrel with Nature for not giving us what she has not to give. It is unreasonable to be so disappointed, but it is disappointment not the less. . . .

PEACOCK: I am afraid I am too matter-of-fact to sympathise very clearly with this form of æstheticism: but here is a charming bit of forest scenery! Look at that old oak with the deer under it. . . . (Chap. IV.)

The most obvious passage to be pointed out in the above extracts as a repetition from the *Memoir* is that containing the image of Falconer looking upon the world “from the loopholes of retreat”; but is there not also observable more than one touch of Scythrop and Mr. Hilary?

There is one more fact which cannot be overlooked, indicating how the recollection of the old days at Bracknell and Marlow was drawn upon for the composition of this book. The paragraph in Chapter XII. containing the account of the forest dell, to which Mr. Falconer walks when trying to rid himself of the obsession of Morgana's image, is merely an expansion of the two sentences in *The Last Day of Windsor Forest*, describing the Bourne, a spot which Peacock tells us he had not seen since he was in the habit of visiting it with Shelley. With the memory of this friend he ends up his life as a novelist, as he had begun it with his company.

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This reincarnation seems a remarkable proof both of the mighty influence exercised by Shelley upon Peacock, and of the intimate nature of his writings. The more we knew of his life, the better would be our understanding of his novels. The impression given by *Gryll Grange* is, that it is a very strong case in point ; in reading it, the conviction grows that it could only have been fully commented by those who knew Peacock at Halliford, during the years intervening between his retirement and his death, early in 1866.

Thus many of the regular elements of the Peacockian novel are present, though in a less obvious form, in this work of his old age. Compared with the rest it is more subdued and reflective, and even more personal and idiosyncratic. Already in *Crotchet Castle* it is noticeable that Peacock is introducing more of himself and less of other people than in his earlier books. In this epilogue to all his works—in poetry, fiction, criticism—the tendency to write about himself is seen to have grown strong enough to become the leading element of the book. This is accompanied, perhaps necessarily, by a remarkable artistic carelessness and by a supreme neglect of his public. He is now writing purely and simply to please himself, and he has grown garrulous. Peacock is so personally popular



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with his readers that we are willing to forgive him many things. We suffer him, with but a faint protest, to tell us under cover of fiction, that he once knew a man who tried hard to cut the figure 9 on the ice, and could only succeed by fitting it in between two 8's ; to recapitulate the stages whereby he satisfied himself that the hair of the Vestals was allowed to grow again, once their heads had been shaved ; to repeat long passages of Bojardo, and translate them ; to express a puerile contempt for geological discoveries. But to say truth, the licence of this book is not compensated by the violent, witty exaggerations of the first novels. *Gryll Grange* is far from his masterpiece, and it would be interesting to know if any one, unacquainted with his other works, had read it and remained much impressed. The sympathetic handling of its characters is undoubtedly an attraction ; but the story is preposterous and long drawn out. We can feel no anxiety for the fate of Harry and Dorothy, of Algernon and Morgana, of Lord Curryfin and Miss Niphet. The interest is inevitably centred in the author. We must be content to listen to him while he talks to us of his tastes and habits, chats to us about things which have been occupying his attention, tells us anecdotes.

He is a genial and kindly old man, but easily

upset by anything that worries him. He seldom dines out nowadays, except with one friend of his own age, at whose table he is sure his palate will not be annoyed and his taste for quiet conviviality and good conversation will be indulged. Dinners at strange houses are such a risk. On one of the last occasions when he ventured upon one, he was served with the tail of a mullet, followed by the drumstick of a fowl. And then the after-dinner bore is so intolerable. He was present not so very long ago when a long-winded individual held forth to the uttermost limit of patience on "what's wrong with India," passing from city to city and from province to province in a merciless harangue, until he was forced to pause for breath. The man seated next took the opportunity to start another topic; but the social tyrant touched his arm and said: "Excuse me; now I come to Madras." Of course, on an occasion like that, the only thing to do is to take one's departure, and leave those who like it to listen to it. Reading is safer and more satisfying, especially Greek. There is enough Greek literature extant to provide interest for even a long lifetime, particularly if you go into side issues, the less known tracts of mythology and archæology. How much there is that we still do not know about the Attic

theatre ! Their resonant vases must have had a wonderful effect ; but the principle seems to be lost now, perhaps irrecoverably. What a pity that we cannot find out more about their music ! The Greeks were people of such exquisite sensibility, and their poetry and sculpture reached such a pitch of perfection, that it is impossible to believe their music was as bare and monotonous as the experts would make out. Their melodies at least must have been beautiful. Yes, most beautiful things, most wise pronouncements, were made more than two thousand years ago. But the classical languages as used after the break-up of antiquity are not entirely to be despised. The latinity of many hymns and sequences is tolerable, and their sentiments very acceptable as an offset to the spirit of our machine-made civilisation. Almost all old things are good. Old fashioned dances are charming to watch ; the card games that were popular long ago form an interesting study, and they are so much more sociable than the modern play. Quadrille, for instance, is a *game*, and not like whist, a mere excuse for dogmatism and bad temper. Then the thoughts of age will be dwelling a good deal on the past :

I played with you 'mid cowslips blowing,  
When I was six and you were four ; . .

Time has softened and sweetened most memories ; they can best be enjoyed in retirement, and are rudely disturbed by reports of current affairs. What a detestable thing a newspaper is ! It contains little that is pleasant or profitable to know, and is chiefly made up of the accounts of crimes and disasters, the speeches of insincere politicians, scandals ventilated in the law courts, meetings of ridiculous societies, fraudulent business concerns, and lying advertisements of useless or harmful medicines. To read the papers is to become misanthropic, whereas life among friends, and in one's own garden and library, conduces to geniality and cheerfulness. We can imagine what goes on in the busy world, without facing the horrors of railway travelling, smoke, foul air, gas lighting and crowded humanity to verify it. Or, on arrival of a younger but trusted friend, we can ask him : What news have you brought from London ? And we are pretty sure of the answer : " Not much. Tables turn as usual, and the ghost-trade appears to be thriving : for instead of being merely audible, the ghosts are becoming tangible, and shake hands under the tables with living wiseacres, who solemnly attest the fact. Civilised men ill-use their wives ; the wives revenge themselves in their own way, and the Divorce Court has business enough on its

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hands to employ it twenty years at its present state of progression. Commercial bubbles burst and high-pressure boilers blow up, and mountebanks of all descriptions flourish on public credulity. Everywhere there are wars and rumours of wars. The Peace Society has wound up its affairs in the Insolvent Court of Prophecy. A great tribulation is coming on the earth, and Apollyon in person is to be perpetual dictator of all the nations. There is a meeting of the Pantomagmatic Society, under the presidency of Lord Facing-both-ways, who has opened it with a long speech, philanthropically designed as an elaborate exercise in fallacies, for the benefit of young rhetoricians. The society has divided its work into departments, which are to meddle with everything, from the highest to the lowest—from a voice in legislation to a finger in Jack Horner's pie. . . . In the meantime, we are all pretty comfortable: and sufficient for the day is the evil thereof; which in our case, so far as I can see, happens to be precisely none.”



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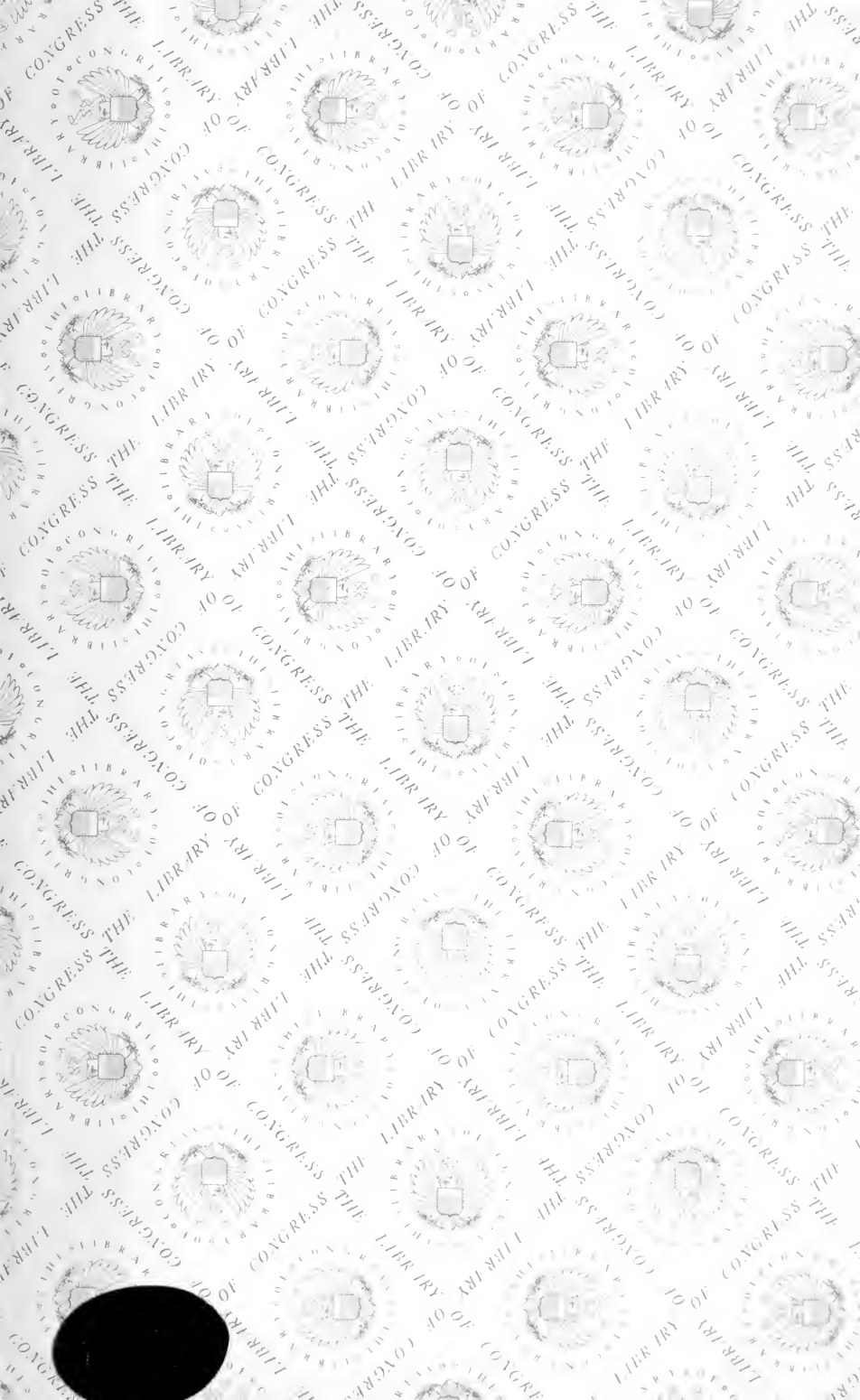




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